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#1 SCI-FI MAG IN THE UNIVERSE!

353

EXCLUSIVE!

MS MARVEL

THE MCU'S NEWEST HERO HAS ARRIVED

JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION
DINOSAURS RULE THE EARTH... AGAIN!

OBI-WAN KENOBI
THE JEDI KNIGHT SPEAKS!

THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS
JOHN WYNDHAM'S CLASSIC REVISITED

THE BOYS
SHOWDOWN FOR THE SUPES

LIGHTYEAR
TO INFINITY... AND BEYOND!

PLUS! MEN | NIGHT SKY | WILD CARDS | ANT-MAN | BLADE RUNNER



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NEW HORIZONS FOR THE CREW OF

THE ORVILLE

PLUS! MEN | NIGHT SKY | WILD CARDS | ANT-MAN | BLADE RUNNER



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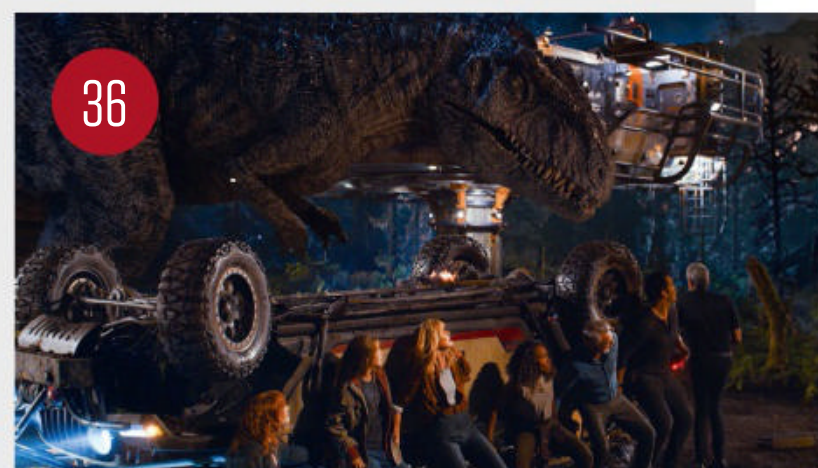
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Author of the most alarming Dickensian fantasy since Jacob Rees-Mogg.



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GET IN TOUCH!

First Contact

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TRICKY DEVILS

Keith Tudor, email It was great to see the Sea Devils return in the *Doctor Who* Easter special. I enjoyed their classic look, and I liked the ambition of the episode. It did, however, feel incomplete. One moment the Doctor and Yaz are trapped in the Sea Devils' control room with the Sea Devil captain, then moments later they're swinging onto the other ship with no explanation of how they got free. The "next time" teaser, though, looks incredible. I'm looking forward to seeing classic companions Tegan and Ace return.

SFX: Let's just assume the Doctor reversed the polarity of the neutron flow. Or possibly unlocked the spatio-temporal hyperlink. She'll explain later...

LOOK WHO'S STALKING

Simon R Green, email Just wanted to say how nice it was to see my *Deathstalker* books mentioned in the latest *SFX* [*SFX* 351]. Good to know someone remembers them. They have been optioned several times, but unfortunately never got made. Most of my books have been optioned, at one time or another. For a while Universal were going to make a television series based on my *Nightside* books – we even had John Carpenter attached to direct the pilot – and it still didn't get made. Such is Hollywood.

I'm still here, still writing. I had a heart attack last year, which slowed me down for a while, but my 72nd book appeared from Baen in the US a few months back: *Jekyll & Hyde Inc.*

I also enjoyed the article on film novelisations; I wrote the one on *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves*. The stories I could tell you about that one...

SFX: Did someone threaten to call off Christmas, by any chance? Great to hear from you, Simon, and we hope you write many more books.



Star Trek: Picard: too much content that doesn't drive the story. This could probably be fan-edited down to a two-hour film.

Paul Anthony



The new *Doctor Who*: Lydia West is my preferred choice, as I'll tell anyone that'll listen (which, sadly, has yet to include anyone with any actual influence).

@TheLlamaGod

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"You're a mouldy dry burger"



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Rants & Raves

Inside the SFX hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR



RAVES

→ *Star Trek: The Motion Picture – The Director's Edition* was like watching a whole new movie. I loved it.

→ *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* is great fun as well.

→ Had a sneak peek at *Lightyear* and it looks so much more sci-fi than I was expecting.

→ *Doctor Strange* is great – a Marvel horror movie with the best villain the series has ever had. Spoilers!

RANTS

→ So many new shows, so many embargoes!

IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR



RAVES

→ Delighted that the brilliant *Severance* has been greenlit for a second season. It takes some of the sting out of Netflix axing *Archive 81*.

→ Looking forward to Titan's book on the Peter Cushing *Doctor Who* movies (due in September – see bit.ly/whofilmsbook).

→ We need an entire season of *TNG: The Animated Series* (see bit.ly/animatedtng). Someone make it so!

→ Penguin Classics' swanky new Marvel Collection hardbacks are going straight on my Amazon wishlist. Ooh, gold-foil stamping.

JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR



RANTS

→ *Outer Range* has me hooked. A very slow burn, but just the right side of weird. Great soundtrack too!

→ Another enjoyable series of *Inside No. 9* so far. "Mr King" was particularly hilarious/terrifying. Surprised that they've not done more folk horror episodes, actually.

ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR



RAVES

→ Very pleased to hear that David Lynch would be interested in doing a director's cut of the 1984 *Dune* – not least because it might be the last film-related thing we see from him.

RANTS

→ I'm a big fan of Sharon Horgan so it's a shame that her co-creation *Shining Vale* turned out to be so poor. Too many cooks, maybe?

NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE



RIP

→ Sad to hear of the passing of Dave Bath from Cardiff Fantasy Centre – or Pete 'n' Dave's, as I always knew it. My first comic shop, and such great memories of Saturday morning expeditions to get my Marvel and DC fix.

RANTS

→ Ended up underwhelmed by *Star Trek: Picard* season two. Too much wheel-spinning!

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR



RAVES

→ It's rare that a book adaptation is better than the book, but Silka Luisa's upgrades to Lauren Beukes's book for the Apple TV+ streaming series *Shining Girls* make it a fantastic watch.

RANTS

→ Wish I liked *Moon Knight* more. *Legion* season one did it better.

"Take your f*cking twink and get the f*ck out of here!"



Captain's Log



You know how I keep saying how lucky we are to have so much "genre" (ie. the best) content at the moment? Well, this month is a prime example of that. Ever-committed in our mission to bring you as much coverage as we possibly can, I realised that we actually had too much. Whoops. So there's a slightly smaller news section, and a couple of our regulars have gracefully bowed out for this month. What can I say? I wish the magazine was dimensionally transcendental.

Anyway, perhaps when you see what's in store you won't mind... or even notice! Basically it looks like another month indoors (voluntarily, this time) for us lot. Look at all the shiny new things! Keep your spring weather, I'll be sitting in the dark, thank you. I've had sneak peeks at *The Orville* and *Lightyear* and have been blown away – I'm so glad to see the former finally back. It seems like another lifetime when Krill stormed SDCC in 2019 where the creative team were talking about what they had in store. Little did any of us know it would be another three years – but definitely worth the wait.

In another galaxy (far, far away) we've got the latest *Star Wars* series landing shortly, alongside new episodes of *The Boys*, a dinosaur invasion and yet another great new Marvel series. Let us know what you think of all the latest releases – see page left for our contact details. As ever, stay safe and we'll see you in four weeks!

Darren X

PREPARE TO HAVE YOUR WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Take an epic journey to Hawkins, Indiana, to explore the roots of Netflix's smash-hit show. You'll find profiles of the series' much-loved characters, meet the creatures of the Upside Down, discover in-depth season breakdowns, and much more!



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JUNE
2022

10 Travelling Light Years

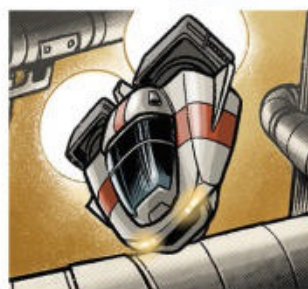
What lurks in the garden in
new drama *Night Sky*?

Highlights



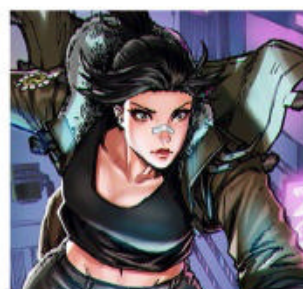
8 MEN

→ There's nothing relaxing about Alex Garland's new holiday horror. Tschh... men, eh?



14 SPECTRUM

→ *Spectra* is green for a new Gerry Anderson anthology comic book featuring many favourites.



16 BLADE RUNNER

→ Anime series *Black Lotus* gets a new comic book spin-off. Keep up, now.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Village People

Alex Garland gets surreal in **Men**, his latest twist on the horror genre



AFTER A BRIEF sojourn in streaming television with *Devs*, writer/director Alex Garland is back to cinematic storytelling with his latest *Men*, a thoughtful yet challenging exploration of horror, myth and toxic masculinity.

It stars Jessie Buckley as Harper, a recently widowed woman who goes to the countryside to process what she's just been through. In an English village, she rents an extremely well-appointed house for two weeks, and runs into several of the local male residents (all played by Rory Kinnear) who each have a disturbing impact on her stay.

Garland crafted *Men* to have several possible paths of interpretation, as Harper wrestles with remembering the traumatic day of the death of her husband James (Paapa Essiedu). Asked how he labels it, Garland tells Red Alert, "It is a horror film, but it's also not. It uses some horror tropes and genre conventions, and then not others, I suppose."

Men does indeed use many of the methods of genre storytelling, from folk horror to body horror, as Harper works through her grief and anger. Placing her in such a gorgeous manor surrounded by

lush fields and old-growth forests, Garland says it was a journey itself to figure out where one might want to go in order to process something of the sort that Harper is dealing with.

"I wanted the countryside to have a slightly Richard Curtis feeling at the beginning, of being very benign and unreal, actually," Garland says of the director's bourgeois oeuvre. "And then bend it, really. It's ways of misleading and ways of using colour and stuff like that."

"I was trying to make a film about a sense of horror, and that's what I think this film is," Garland continues. I think it's a film about a sense of horror. That could be interpreted in many different ways, or could lead you in different ways. A horror film about the sense of horror was roughly what I had turning around in my head. And I like genre. I feel comfortable in it, as it gives you a bunch of free gifts in terms of the tools you can use, but also ways that you can subvert it, or try to subvert it."

Fans of folk horror should appreciate the way Garland layers plenty of classic iconography that Harper comes across in her rambles in the woods, or at the

Harper (Jessie Buckley) has a chat with a friendly local.

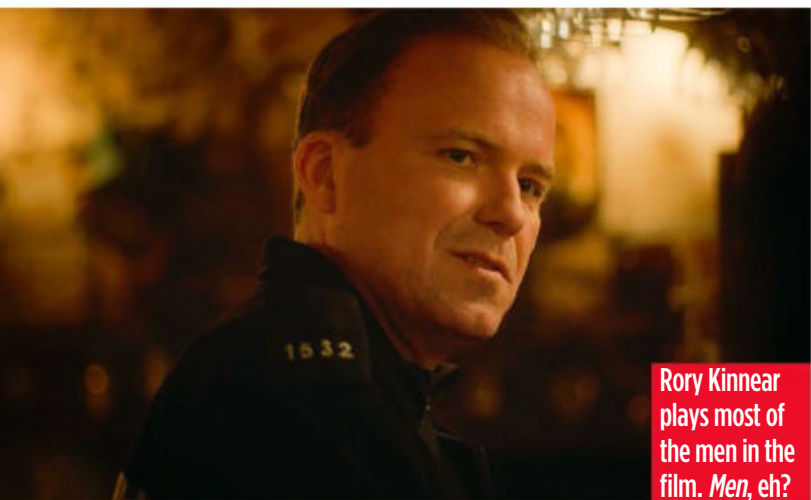


“A horror film about the sense of horror was roughly what I had turning around in my head”

local vicarage, with its sternly adorned baptismal fonts that hint at the themes percolating beneath the surface of the narrative. Garland says that there are two pieces of imagery in particular that he's long been trying to weave into his films which eventually found their home in *Men*.

"There's a thing called the Green Man and one that's called SÍla na Géige [also known as Sheela-na-gig]," Garland says, going on to describe two visuals that are motifs in *Men*. "They are bits of imagery that you find in medieval churches, but they predate medieval times, and they're all over Europe. And in fact, they stretch beyond Europe."

"They're interesting, because they're such powerful bits of iconography. They provoke a response of one sort or another when you see them, but there's not really very much information



Rory Kinnear plays most of the men in the film. *Men*, eh?



A starry, starry night... what could possibly go wrong?



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

- Animated sequel **Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse** scuttles to 2 June 2023.
- Susan Sarandon is villainous Victoria Kord in DC Comics adap **Blue Beetle**.
- Blumhouse scrapping **Mina Harker** movie.
- Bill Skarsgård is the new Eric Draven in reboot of **The Crow**, starring alongside FKA Twigs.
- *Candyman*'s Nia DaCosta helping adaptation of Ta-Nehisi Coates's novel **The Water Dancer**.
- Live-action *D&D* movie confirmed as **Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves**, targeting 23 March 2023 release.
- Searchlight Pictures adapting Walter Tevis's SF novel **Mockingbird**.
- Will Ferrell joining Margot Robbie's **Barbie** movie.
- *John Wick* creator Derek Kolstad bringing Sega beat-'em-up **Streets Of Rage** to the big screen.
- Christopher Lloyd and Rachael Leigh Cook starring in **Spirit Halloween**.
- Levi Miller joining Spider-spin-off **Kraven The Hunter**.
- Jason Momoa in talks to voice lead character in Warner Bros' **Minecraft**.



Many churches were originally built on pagan sites...



about them. Sometimes people, academics or whatever, will present some kind of explanation for them. But there isn't really a good, clear, certain explanation because they predate written language. Or at least they predate written language in a culture that *had* a written language. I have written probably three or four scripts using that iconography over the last 15 years. But this was the first time I got it to the point of actually making it into a film. So the genesis goes back ages."

When it comes to how all this ends up playing a part in Harper's experiences and how audiences should interpret what the film lays before them, Garland remains coy. But he does say that *Men* was created for many viewpoints, especially with regard to how women and men will experience

what the heroine goes through. He hopes it foment conversations about gendered aggressions and cultural expectations.

"With *Men*, I'm trying to lean into something which has to do with the way the audiences interpret and imaginatively engage with images and story," Garland says. "Its simplest form is when two people read the same book and they disagree about the motivation of a character or how a plot point happened. That's in the nature of a narrative being offered up and a narrative being received.

"But in this film, I particularly wanted to step back, because there's an element of it where the nature of the way it is interpreted by different people is actually what the film *is*." **TB**

Men is in cinemas from 1 June.

SCI-FACT! Rory Kinnear worked out 10 different looks and biographies for each of the men he plays.

GETTY

SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

Chamber Of Secrets

The mundane and the fantastical collide in **Night Sky**

→ IRENE (SISSY SPACEK) and Franklin York (JK Simmons) are harbouring a secret in *Night Sky* – a cosmic-sized secret. The TV series centres on the elderly married couple, who years ago uncovered a chamber in their backyard. This otherworldly structure grants them access to a strange, deserted planet, which they periodically visit and observe from within the safety of the device.

Showrunner and co-creator Daniel C Connolly explains that “a big part of the show is the co-existence of the fantastical and mundane in our lives. We wanted to do a very character-driven and closely observed drama that also has this sci-fi element that filters into the series,” he tells Red Alert. “We think that’s something you don’t see a lot of. God bless all the science fiction. They can be big and stylised and contain a lot of

whizz-bang. I love to watch that stuff too. But I think there is a big tent in the sci-fi world. We tried to carve out this little corner for ourselves that put the character stuff front and centre. Then we added this special magical and mysterious element to the storytelling, where the sci-fi hopefully feels organic and grounded, and sits with the rest of the sensibility of the show.”

The Yorks’ world gets further turned upside down when they discover an unconscious young man lying on the chamber floor. The appearance of this individual (played by Chai Hansen) – whom they name Jude, since he suffers from amnesia and can’t remember anything – raises several questions. Seemingly from the distant planet, is Jude an alien? Could he be dangerous? And does Jude hold the key to unlocking the mysteries of the chamber?

“On one hand, Irene is desperate to get this chamber to deliver some sort of answer on why it exists,” Connolly says. “Jude is the first time it kind of answers that question for her. She desperately wants to get to the deeper meaning of what his arrival means for the couple, and what this thing really is.

“Franklin is on a different page,” he continues. “So much of his identity is tied up in providing for and protecting and caring for his wife that, against some of his better instincts, he lets this young man have a presence in their lives. He’s very suspicious of him, and tests those suspicions, which Jude passes.”

After earning his place in Irene’s heart, Jude somehow becomes the pair’s caretaker around the house for the remainder of the season, which takes place over eight to 10 days. A good chunk of that



Veteran actor Sissy Spacek is Irene.



What’s this Jude fella about, then?



Franklin (JK Simmons): a normal man.



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ **Wonder Twin** powers... activate! KJ Apa and Isabel May are the DC super-siblings for HBO Max.

→ Worf, Crusher and LaForge debuting in **Star Trek: Picard** for season three.

→ HBO Max developing **Welcome To Derry**, a prequel series to Stephen King's *It*.

→ Peacock developing - excuse us while we spew ectoplasm - "dark reimagining" of **Casper The Friendly Ghost**.

→ Post-slap aftershock: Netflix cancelling **Bright** sequel with Will Smith.

→ Walker Scobell scoring the lead in **Percy Jackson** series for Disney+.

→ *Killing Eve*'s Ayoola Smart playing Aviendha in season two of **The Wheel Of Time**.

→ *Cobra Kai*'s Michael Jonathan Smith showrunning TV version of **Twisted Metal** gaming franchise.

→ Robbie Amell and Meng'er Zhang boarding season three of **The Witcher**.

→ Whoopi Goldberg is Bird Woman in Amazon's Neil Gaiman adap **Anansi Boys**.

→ Netflix set to end **Locke & Key** after season three.



GETTY



Night Sky does what it says on the tin.

narrative involves filling in the blanks of his memory. Connolly says that one of the challenges was crafting Jude's arc without giving too many details away, while also letting audiences know that the character does have an agenda: finding his father and the truth about himself.

"With any child who loses a connection to a parent, there's always that hold there," says Connolly. "Jude has reached an age where he's lost in his life, and he feels his father might provide an answer. It becomes a search for that person. That theme is mirrored in some of the other characters, too."

Indeed, a mother and daughter story in Argentina acts as another entry point into *Night Sky*'s mythology. Stella (Julieta Zylberberg) and Toni (Rocio Hernandez) share a connection to a second chamber located on their property, one that has remained in

“We wanted to do a very character-driven drama”

their family's care for hundreds of years. The two embark on a road trip to track Jude down for their own enigmatic purposes. Toni doesn't know the full story about her father and has been kept out of the loop regarding her family's duties to the chamber.

"Stella and Toni have a very different relationship to what the chamber stands for and the origins of it," Connolly says. "The Yorks are blind as to what it is. Stella and the community she comes from have more information, but she has kept it hidden from Toni. There is a darkness to some of the responsibilities the family has to this chamber, so Stella has tried to shield her daughter from that."

Genre audiences often complain that series with high-concept premises such as this pile on the mythology and conundrums with little to no pay-off. Connolly is fully aware of those potential pitfalls and promises that *Night Sky* will deliver the goods.

"We have tried to give Easter eggs and answers, so you never feel like you are in a spot where things are not happening or the sci-fi has disappeared," he says. "It's important for the audience to have a sense of satisfaction."

"The interesting thing is audiences also say they don't like when things are laid out for them on a platter," Connolly concludes. "It's striking this balance of handing out the right amount of information and intrigue, but never letting people feel as if they are blowing in the wind." **BC**

All eight episodes of Night Sky are on Prime Video from 20 May.

► **SCI-FACT!** The series was commissioned as *Lightyears*, but renamed, presumably to avoid confusion with *Lightyear*.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Killing Jokers

Paul Cornell is taking *Wild Cards* back to the beginning in **The Drawing Of The Cards**

► SET IN A WORLD POPULATED BY genetically-altered superhumans, George RR Martin and Melinda M Snodgrass's shared universe anthology *Wild Cards* has previously enjoyed several original comic book spin-offs.

Now, scripted by Paul Cornell – who's contributed to several volumes over the years – *The Drawing Of The Cards* represents the first direct adaptation of the *Wild Cards* short

stories, starting with the opening three tales from 1987's inaugural collection.

Cornell believes that the four-parter provides the perfect introduction for new readers. "It's the best way in, showing, as it does, the enormous events of the day when the Wild Card bioweapon was released over New York, creating a divergent timeline from our own involving superpowered 'aces' and 'jokers,'" he says. "Anyone with no knowledge

of the *Wild Cards* universe can start right at the beginning with this series and you don't need to know anything going in. This is the story of the arrival of the Wild Card virus on Earth, what humans horribly do with it, and how some of our protagonists sacrifice themselves and some are left picking up the pieces."

Illustrated by Mike Hawthorne, issues one and two combine George RR Martin's "Prologue" with Howard Waldrop's "Thirty Minutes Over Broadway". "The first two issues hop back and forth between the first two stories because they happen pretty much simultaneously, setting up the world," explains Cornell. "They introduce us to Dr Tachyon, a human nickname for an alien scientist who tries to stop his people from testing the Wild Card bioweapon on Earth, and Jetboy, a fighter ace who heroically tries to stop the release of the weapon."

"Tachyon is delayed and frustrated by the US government and ends up only able to pick up the pieces. Jetboy is a heroic archetype who fails to save New York and whose sacrifice means he becomes venerated by future generations of flawed heroes. Neither are superheroes, neither are happy with the images they get given by the government."

Drawn by Enid Balám, the final two issues focus on Roger Zelazny's key character, Croyd Crenson, aka the Sleeper. "Croyd's just a tough kid when we first meet him, but he's someone who is affected by the release of the virus, as he transforms into different superpowered beings every time he goes to sleep," says Cornell.

"To save his family from starvation, he becomes a small-time criminal and loses his childhood. His ethical struggle in a world reeling from viral trauma begins in issues three and four."

Cornell believes that the stories in *Wild Cards* are ideally suited to comic books. "They actually lend themselves really well to comics because they're so action-packed and visual," he says, noting that *Wild Cards* boasts a very different tone to the Marvel Universe.

"This is a fully-realised alternate timeline that starts just after World War Two and stretches to the present day, a fictional universe where

stories are still being written in real time, with no reboots or resets since it was first created, so characters age and die and the world changes over the time. It's a rich tapestry." **SJ**

Wild Cards: The Drawing Of The Cards issue one is out on 1 June.





Brian (David Earl) and his robo-chum Charles.

FESTIVAL PREVIEW

Time In The Sun

Sundance Film Festival: London is back with a bang



SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL: LONDON takes place at Picturehouse Central in London from 9-12 June, with additional festival screenings taking place in cinemas across the UK. Two premieres of particular interest to *SFX* readers are *Brian And Charles* and *Hatching*.

Brian And Charles expands an award-winning 2017 short, also by director Jim Archer, and is written by David Earl and Chris Hayward, who also play the titular duo. Following a harsh winter, Brian goes into a deep depression. Cut off from anyone else and alone, he tackles the situation by building a robot. We'll have more coverage of the film next issue.

Finnish-language body horror movie *Hatching*, meanwhile, is directed by Hanna Bergholm. It tells the story of 12-year-old gymnast Tinja, who's doing her best to impress her pushy, controlling mother. When Tinja finds the strange egg of a wounded bird in the woods, she brings it home to tend to it until it hatches. The creature that soon emerges brings about a seriously twisted reality for both mother and daughter... **DS**

The full Sundance Film Festival: London programme is available at picturehouses.com/sundance, where you can also buy tickets and passes.

Hatching: ornithophobic folk need not apply.



Brick To The Future

The Time Machine – no car brand names here – from 1985's *Back To The Future* screeches into Lego collections worldwide at 88mph.

This new 1,872-piece set – measuring 14" long – can be built in three different options, with a lightning rod and plutonium

chamber, Mr Fusion and hover conversion or whitewall tyres and a circuit board.

It comes with minifigures of Doc Brown and Marty McFly, as well as accessories like Marty's hoverboard and the OUTATIME number plate. **£149.99, lego.com**

SCI-FACT! Originally it was planned that Marty McFly would travel through time using a fridge. Which would have been cool.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

FAB Three

New *Captain Scarlet*, *Space Precinct* and *Terrahawks* return in comics anthology **Spectrum**

WHILE IT IS CURRENTLY REPRINTING ITS classic comics in lavish collections, Anderson Entertainment is also teaming up with Time Bomb Comics on an anthology of all-new stories focusing on some of Gerry Anderson's later creations: namely *New Captain Scarlet*, *Space Precinct* and *Terrahawks*.

"*Spectrum* showcases the Gerry Anderson concepts which are owned outright by Anderson Entertainment," explains Time Bomb's Steve Tanner. He's also scripting the strip of 2005 CGI reboot *New Captain Scarlet*, which he describes as having "lots of great, fast-paced action. The characters are much more dynamic than what was achieved with the puppetry of the original. It's good to see a more diverse mix in there, too. For both series, there's one thing in equal measure – great action/adventure stories, so that's the vibe I went for with my story 'The Equinox Gambit'."

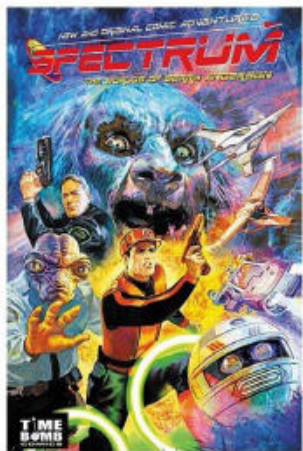
"I didn't really have to focus on character design as the New Captain Scarlet is such an instantly recognisable character, which left more room to concentrate on the storytelling," adds artist Pete L Woods. "I used a nine-panel grid layout for the pages, and tried to capture the vibrancy and energy from the TV show."

Meanwhile, writer Richmond Clements took a different approach to *Space Precinct*, the live-action series first screened in 1994. "I did a bit of reading and found out that while the show had been cut to suit the early evening slot it had been given, the

original premise was a lot more adult," he explains. "I took this as my starting point and decided to just go for it and create a proper movie-style adversary in the Marionette Killer."

"I had a slightly different brief than the other *Spectrum* artists," continues his artist, James Gray. "Where most of the Gerry Anderson shows were puppetry, bright colours and mostly daytime storytelling, *Space Precinct* was very much Anderson goes teen, with live action, real actors and a very dark colour palette, so it was edgier."

Writer Dan Whitehead, meanwhile, has taken on Anderson's final puppet show *Terrahawks*. "The idea was never to update or reinvent the characters, but to produce stories that felt like they could have been part of the original runs of the respective shows," he says. "But one of the things I wanted to do was give the character of Mary Falconer more of a spotlight. *Terrahawks* was much more of an ensemble, so finding a balance between giving every character a role in the story required some juggling."



"At the start, my main worry was whether I should draw the characters as humans or puppets," adds artist Ste Pickford. "I wasn't sure if the proportions of the oversized puppet heads from the show should be translated into the comic, or if I should draw proper human proportions. So they've ended up somewhere in-between." SJ

This is how things will look in 18 years.

Spectrum issue one is out in June.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

A Bug's Life

Al Ewing and Tom Reilly celebrate **Ant-Man**'s 60th birthday with an era-spanning new miniseries

➔ COINCIDING WITH his 60th anniversary, Ant-Man is returning in a new miniseries by writer Al Ewing and artist Tom Reilly. It focuses not only on the miniature Avenger's current incarnation Scott Lang, but also highlights the other two holders of the shrinking suit, original incumbent Hank Pym and successor Eric O'Grady.

"One of the things I have fun with is pastiche – trying to capture the voice of a particular era or writer while still maintaining my own grip on the work," Ewing tells Red Alert. "It made for a fun challenge to really inhabit the various eras of Ant-Man, from the '60s to the modern day, although I've tried to avoid using Hank Pym's other identities like Giant-Man and Yellowjacket, as I'm sure there'll be time enough for that when we get to the anniversary of Goliath!"

With each issue concentrating on a different Ant-Man, the existing trio are also joined by a mysterious future Ant-Man. "I've tried to create a unique narrative voice for him as well," says Ewing, who refuses to say more.

"Once you know that he's from the future and he ties the overarching story together, you've got as much information as I'm comfortable letting out right now," he adds, although he will confirm that we can expect appearances by some other familiar faces. "Janet Van Dyne [aka The Wasp] is in the first issue and Cassie Lang will be

“It made for a fun challenge to really inhabit the various eras of Ant-Man”

in the third issue, as Ant-Man isn't really Ant-Man without his supporting cast!"

Recalling that "I found them very charming," Ewing drew on the reprints he came across in the early 2000s in Marvel's bumper-sized *Essential Collections*. "I have a soft spot for Ant-Man, especially those early '60s adventures before Giant-Man came to be," he recalls. "There's a run of short, fun tales where Hank Pym faces off against a bunch of small-scale enemies that read like forgotten DC gems as much as entries into the Marvel canon. Something about the quirkiness of those tales hits a particular frequency, which the more classic, bombastic Marvel style doesn't."

Describing it as using "almost the opposite approach," *Ant-Man* couldn't be more different to Ewing's recently concluded stint on *Immortal Hulk*. "The *Hulk* run was quite a serious book, planned for 50 issues, with a lot of theological allusions and some very personal feelings baked in," says Ewing.

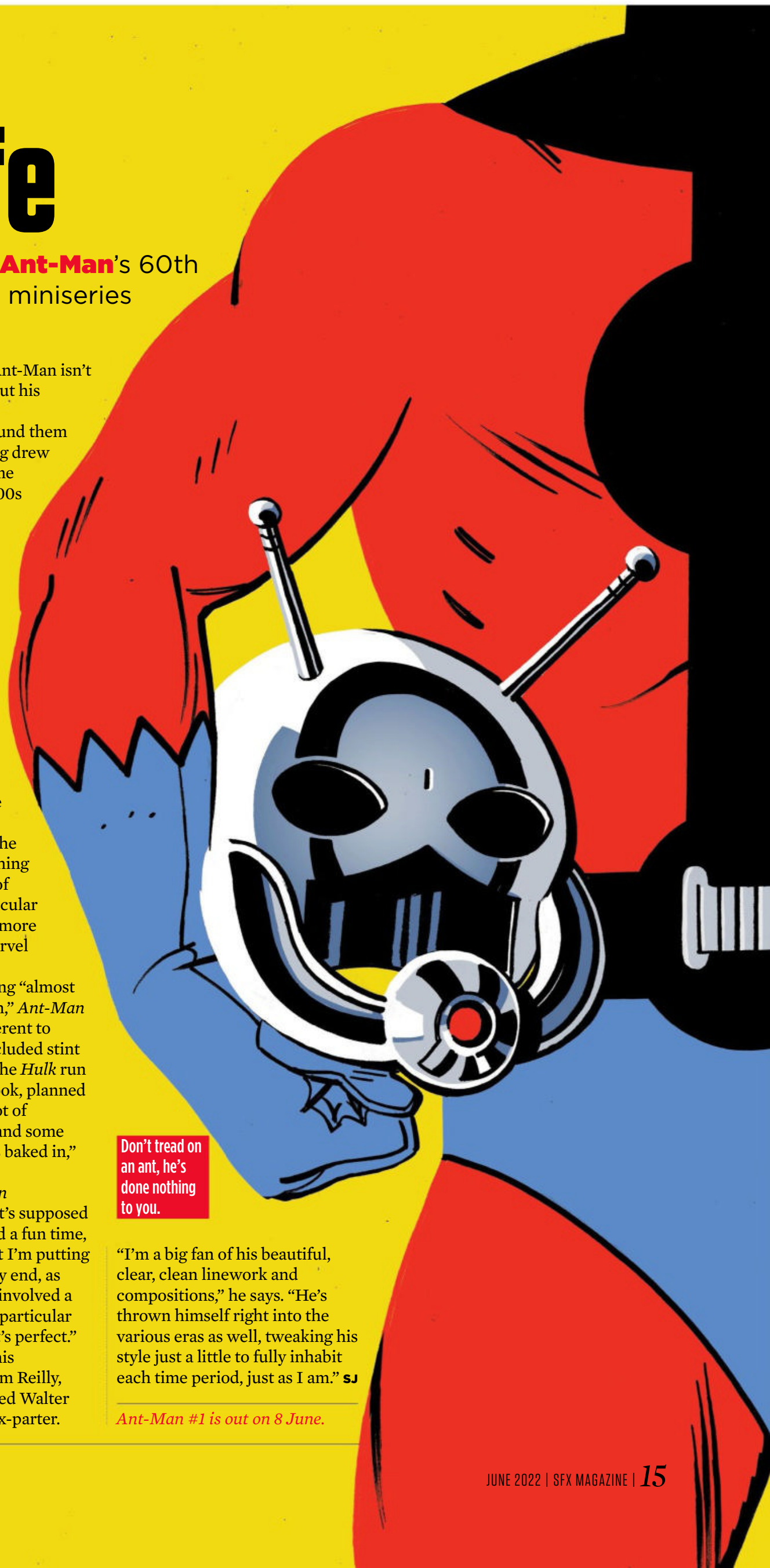
"This is an *Ant-Man* anniversary story, so it's supposed to be a celebration and a fun time, and it will be. Not that I'm putting any less work in on my end, as every issue so far has involved a lot of research on the particular period to make sure it's perfect."

Ewing is enjoying his collaboration with Tom Reilly, who recently illustrated Walter Mosley's *The Thing* six-parter.

Don't tread on an ant, he's done nothing to you.

"I'm a big fan of his beautiful, clear, clean linework and compositions," he says. "He's thrown himself right into the various eras as well, tweaking his style just a little to fully inhabit each time period, just as I am." **SJ**

Ant-Man #1 is out on 8 June.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Dark Bloom

Nancy A Collins on bringing anime **Blade Runner: Black Lotus** to comic books

WHILE IT IS BRINGING its spin-off of Ridley Scott's classic sci-fi film to a close, Titan Comics is continuing to explore the dystopian future world of *Blade Runner*, releasing a miniseries based on the CGI anime television series *Blade Runner: Black Lotus*. The four-parter is written by Nancy A Collins – best known for her novels starring the vampire Sonja Blue, as well as her run on *Swamp Thing* in the early 1990s – who is joined by artist Enid Balam.

BLOODY ELLE

"I've been a fan of the original *Blade Runner* film since it first came out, and I would later become a protégé of one of the founders of the cyberpunk genre of science fiction in the late 1980s," recalls Collins. "I wasn't familiar with the anime, as it was in development/early production when I was brought in as a writer for the miniseries. Although I was allowed to read the original screenplays for the series, so I had an idea of what the general story was."

Set in Los Angeles in 2032, the Japanese/American co-production falls somewhere in-between the 2019 setting of the first movie and the 2049 milieu of Denis

Villeneuve's 2017 sequel. "The appeal of the miniseries to me is there are blank spots within the chronology of the *Blade Runner: Black Lotus* universe that allow me to extrapolate on events that must have occurred in order to lead up to the events in the film sequel," says Collins. "It's the kind of fill-in-the-blanks world building I find challenging."

Voiced in English by Jessica Henwick, the *Black Lotus* herself is Elle, a replicant, who was created for a sinister but as yet unknown purpose. "I like the fact that she is

a true innocent in a corrupt world, finding out who and what she is without being compromised by

outside agendas," continues Collins. "She was created to be a tool of destruction but has evolved far beyond that, and now she's trying to figure out where she fits into the scheme of things – if she ever will."

Though Collins says "I'm afraid I can't discuss that right now," Elle will come up against a mysterious new type of replicant, as she – perhaps vainly – attempts to leave her violent past behind her and start a new life. And like the anime itself, the

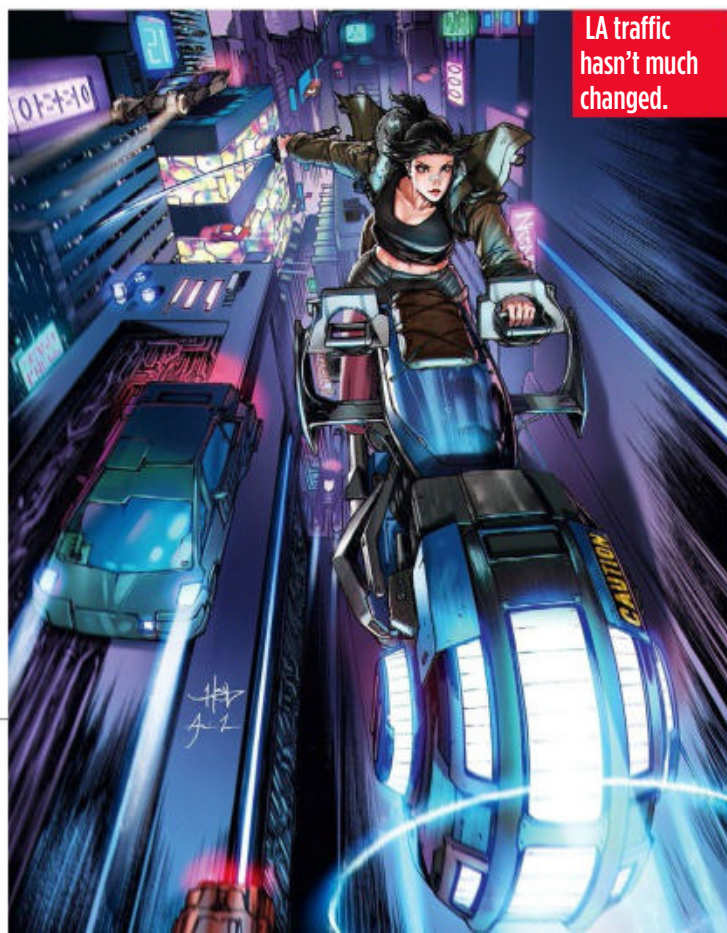
comic will, Collins promises, have plenty of familiar faces and intriguing links to both movies. "There are references to Niander Wallace Jr and the replicant ban from the anime and the film series, as well as the ongoing economic and ecological fallout from the global climate change depicted throughout the series in all its iterations," teases Collins, who is enjoying her partnership with Enid Balam.

"I haven't had any direct contact with Enid, but I find his work to be very evocative," she says of the Mexican artist. "I'm doing my best to design my scripts so that they make use of his strengths as a visual storyteller." **SJ**

Blade Runner: Black Lotus issue one is out on 1 June.



Cover art for issue one, by Junggeun Yoon.



LA traffic hasn't much changed.

SCI-FACT! James Bama's model for Doc Savage was Steve Holland, who played Flash Gordon in the '50s TV series.

NEW AUTHOR

SAARA EL-ARIFI

MEET THE EX-MARKETING PROFESSIONAL BEHIND FANTASY *THE FINAL STRIFE*

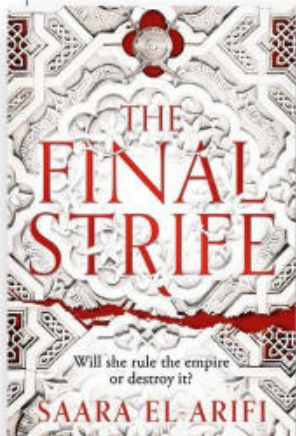


Tell us about your protagonist.

→ Sylah was destined to rule the empire, trained by rebels to one day infiltrate the upper class. But the massacre of her family cuts her destiny short, so she turns to drugs and drink to numb her days.

How does magic work in this world?

→ An inkwell – a metal cuff around the wrist – and a stylus are used to draw blood. Using the stylus, the user's then able to draw in runes that manipulate push and pull forces.



How does the book reflect real-world cultures?

→ Cultures, religions and ethnicities have always collided in my world. I was raised in the Middle East to a Ghanaian/British mother and a Sudanese father. The world of *The Final Strife* was a

refuge for my conflicting identity, allowing me to create a land that was wholly me. Like my experiences, it's marred by racism, colonisation and the seismic shifts of Empire.

How long did it take to write?

→ The first draft took four months – yes, those months are a blur! I then got to work extensively with my editors, and the story nearly doubled in length!

Any advice for would-be authors?

→ Try to write a little every day. Writing's a bit like running: the more you do it the better you get and the longer you can write for. Though honestly, I've never run in my life, but you get the idea! **IB**

The Final Strife is out on 23 June, published by Harper Voyager.

THE FINAL FRONTIER



JAMES BAMA 1926-2022

King of American fantasy illustration

Favouring realism, James Bama brought classic painterly style and a vivid authenticity to such fantastical universes as *Star Trek* and Universal Monsters. Born in Washington Heights, New York, Bama found early inspiration in Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* newspaper strip. Making his first sale at 15, he followed military service by becoming a commercial illustrator, specialising in the brawny world of men's adventure magazines and paperbacks.

Bama's cover for *The Man Of Bronze* in 1964 launched a phenomenally popular series of *Doc Savage* books, repackaging the original pulp magazine adventures. Across 62 covers, Bama's depiction of Doc as a golden-eyed colossus, veins straining beneath the remnants of a torn shirt, reignited interest in the hero, leading to a Marvel comic book run and a movie in the mid-'70s.

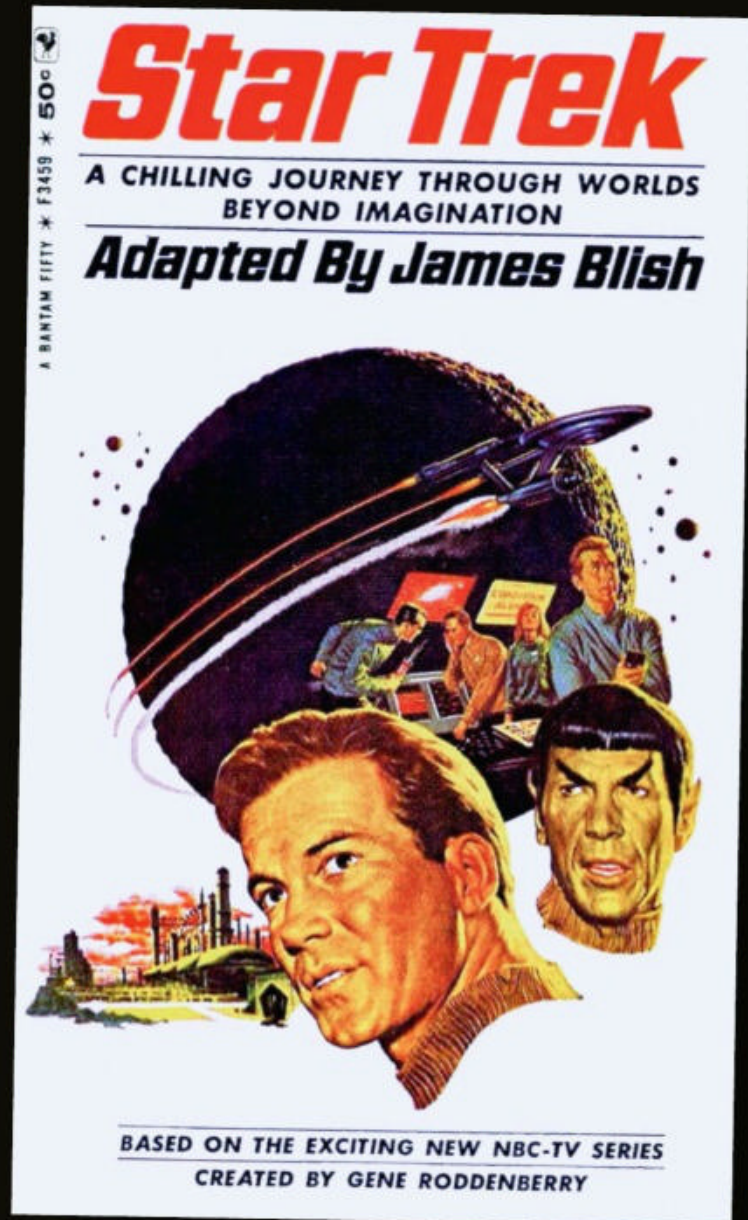
Equally memorably, Bama provided box art for Aurora's line of horror model kits, portraying everyone from King Kong to the Bride of Dracula. "I did the first 22 Monster Kits and I finally quit," he told

menspulp.com in 2014.

"They started having Frankenstein, Dracula, the Mummy and the Wolfman riding hotrod cars, drinking blood from cocktail girls, driving through cemeteries. It got to be too much." Boosted by Bama's richly atmospheric art, each kit sold a million copies to ghoulish kids.

In 1966 Bama created one of the earliest and most enduring promotional images for *Star Trek*: a montage of Kirk, Spock (in their original pilot episode uniforms) and the USS Enterprise. This illustration went on to adorn everything from book covers to T-shirts.

Moving to Wyoming in the '60s, Bama gave up commercial illustration to paint Western scenes. In later years a degenerative eye condition left him legally blind. "I tell my wife the monsters and Doc Savage are going to outlive me," he said at the age of 88. **NS**



DAVID MCKEE 1935-2022

Children's writer and illustrator, best known for creating time-travelling suburbanite and kids' TV favourite Mr Benn.

GARRY LEACH 1954-2022

British comics artist with credits on *Marvelman*, *Warpsmith* and 2000 AD's *The VCs*.

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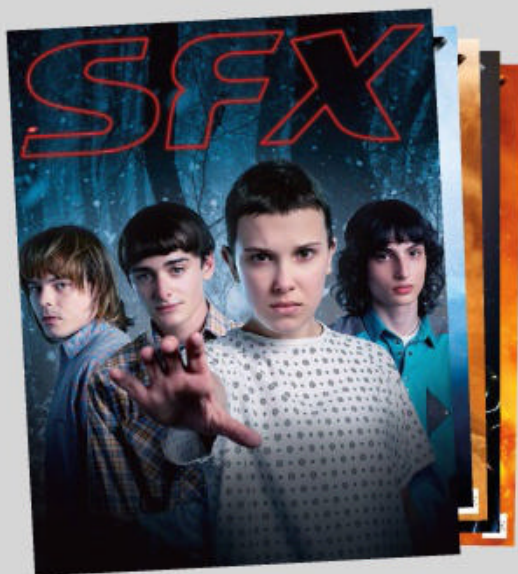
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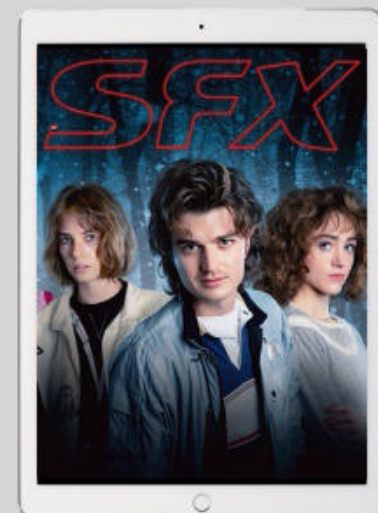


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THE ORVILLE

THE JOY OF SETH

IT'S BEEN THREE YEARS, BUT **THE ORVILLE** IS READY TO SET SAIL ONCE MORE – AND ITS SIGHTS ARE SET FIRMLY ON NEW HORIZONS

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**



THE PLANETARY

Union's mid-level exploratory vessel USS Orville has a bit of swagger about her this year. Yes, she's had some work done, but it's more than just cosmetic. As the formerly comedic sci-fi show returns for a third season – subtitled *New Horizons* – a move from network television to Hulu in the States means *The Orville* is grander than ever, and competing in the big league. Alongside some breathtaking effects and scenes that will make you cry, the crucial difference is that the production team are no longer constrained by “regular” episode lengths.

Creator, writer and Captain Ed Mercer himself, Seth MacFarlane, felt naming the season was appropriate. “It seemed that because the show was going to be making such an uptick in scope, and in many ways, going to feel like a reset, it felt like it wanted something special,” MacFarlane says. “You had a new opening title, a new set, new costumes, a new look, just a new aesthetic that really competes in the world of streaming shows.”

But fear not: “The show is still the show, but with some new aspects to it,” executive producer Brannon Braga says, pointing out that it's not just a matter of the show having a new home. “We're getting to a point in the third season where the kinds of stories we wanted to tell were much broader and more ambitious in scope than even the first two seasons. Seth was feeling constrained by it. The show features a newly revamped Orville, a new crew member on the bridge, and what we think are bigger, more spectacular stories, not just in terms of the visuals and the action, but the emotions and the emotional fireworks as well.”

The catalyst, as MacFarlane describes it, for *The Orville* setting course on a new journey was Charlie Brooker... “I had seen the most recent season of *Black Mirror* [season five in 2019] – they were three very good instalments.

Ed Mercer,
Gordon
Malloy, Bortus
and Grayson.



It just struck me that the limitations of length and primary need to tell a story are so vastly different. What he had done was essentially create three mini-movies, and successfully. It hit me that it sure would be great if we had the same advantage in our storytelling.”

MacFarlane says that the “bummer” about network shows is having to precisely edit to a specific length. “That’s not how storytelling works. Every story is not exactly the same length of time. When you’re forced into that kind of an edit, you’re cutting things that you need for the story, and that improve the story. If a character has an emotional reaction, you want to be able to linger on the actor’s performance. Or you want to be able to linger on a beauty shot of the ship and not have to cut it down just because you have to make room for a fabric softener commercial. That was really what drove me away.”

Hulu was the natural home for the show, given that Disney owns the



property (via the acquisition of Fox) and MacFarlane says that Fox was “gracious” to allow them to relocate his passion project.

“I’ve been a comedy writer for years,” MacFarlane says, “and I’ve found this writing process for *The Orville* the breeziest, smoothest and most enjoyable of anything I’ve ever worked on – not having to sweat through writing jokes. I love jokes. Jokes are great. They’re fun to watch, they’re a pain in the ass to write.

“This genre is something that I’ve always been a fan of. I particularly love allegorical, lighter science fiction that focuses on people. I’m very picky about the sci-fi that I do like. I tend to shy away from the dark, gritty, greasy stuff and lean more toward the moralistic Rod Serling style of writing.

“I wanted to do something special with the season and really try and put a significant career milestone out there. It’s an ambitious show this year. I think we’re putting something special out there. It’s a crowded landscape, but I think – I hope – that we are going to stick out a little bit.”

Part of that ambition sees the show move from its original focus on comedy to a more

“The kinds of stories we wanted to tell were much broader and more ambitious”

dramatic offering with light-hearted moments. “After two seasons, the *Orville* characters have earned their way into the audience’s hearts to some extent, as corny as that sounds,” Braga offers. “We just felt it was time to take some bolder risks with the characters. Even in the first episode, there’s some heavy shit that goes down. And that really sets the stage for the season to come.

“The show just feels bigger on every level. Bigger in scope, bigger in its science fiction ideas and storytelling, but also the emotional journeys the characters go through. If you’re going to try to tackle some of that subject matter, you want to have more of a feature-length running time. They’re all over an hour long, so each is like its own little movie.”

“It’s always about the people, it’s always about the characters,” MacFarlane explains. “The stories can be big, the stories can be profound, but it always has to focus on one particular character or characters who we’re invested in. So there are throughlines, there are serialised arcs that we track throughout the season. But we tried to retain enough of our episodic format, because we found that that’s what audiences really responded to, that they →



Probably best not to be rude to this... thing.



SCOTT GRIMES

is Lt Gordon Malloy

Where is *New Horizons* taking the viewer, in your opinion?

I never thought that Seth MacFarlane could one-up the second season, but he's done it. This season, I just can't believe what he accomplished as a director and writer. These mini-movies gave him full rein to do whatever he wants in the time and with no time constraints. This third season is just phenomenal.

This season feels much bigger in scope.

I went to work every day and saw these things being built; every concept or idea that Seth had, it was right there in front of you. They gave him everything he needed to make the show he always wanted to make, because I do remember as great as seasons one and two were, there were constraints. Hulu, on this third season, let Seth's mind run amok. All his ideas were built in front of us and every day was a new thing. So it's just gargantuan this season. I felt like I was on a Spielberg movie every day. Seth writes this like a 10-hour movie.

What's in store for Gordon this season?

The show did take a turn from the comedy that it was in the first season to

now. It's more just this beautiful, thoughtful science fiction show. You're gonna see Gordon this year become less of a goofball and more of an adult. He wants a relationship and a family, so it was really nice not to have to come in and say a funny line or two. Seth was nice enough to give me some meaty character stuff that I think people are gonna like.

It sounds like Gordon will be put through his paces this year...

I'm so glad I was in semi-good shape, because all I did was get the crap beat out of me. I was running all the time and I'm on these wires... I have all the footage that I'll put out after the episodes air. It was like being on a \$300 million movie. It was very, very challenging.

If they rebooted *Critters*, would you be up for a return?

I would love it. I had this idea where you're at a Comic-Con, actors play themselves, and the Critters eat all the actors and I, as Scott Grimes in *Critters Five* or *Six*, would be fighting the Critters. I thought that would be a neat idea. If done right, I would absolutely love to do *Critters*.



Director Jon Cassar and Lt Talla Keyali (Jessica Szohr).



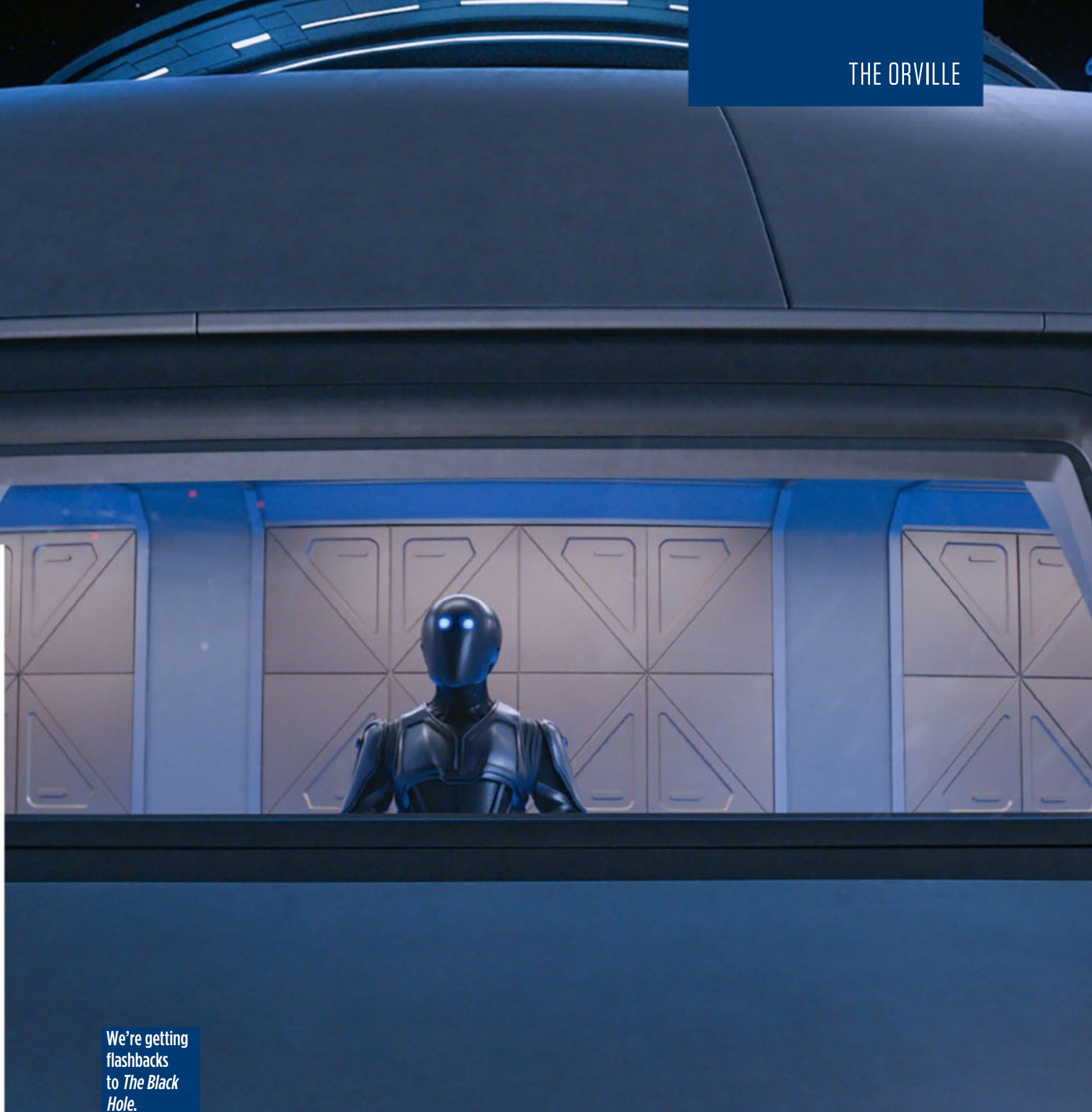
The new Orville, now with adequate parking.

really were watching a self-contained story. We didn't have to open every week with the voiceover that says "Previously on *The Orville*" – you can come in at any point and enjoy the hour. I think there's a real absence of that on television right now. I wish more shows would do it, because it's tough to come up with a brand new idea every week, as opposed to stretching out a single story."

Braga agrees. "At the risk of sounding hyperbolic, it's going to take the viewers to new and unexpected places, not only in terms of the kinds of strange alien worlds and science fictional places, but also emotionally. My tagline for this season was 'Brace for impact'. Episode one is just the tip of the iceberg. There's a lot of stuff that goes down. I was watching episode five with Seth last night, and I got weepy – and I knew what was going to happen!"

Braga describes this season as "state of the art", mentioning that





We're getting
flashbacks
to *The Black
Hole*.

"Seth wanted to go full feature-quality" throughout. "When you look at some of the science fiction and fantasy being done on other channels, you realise if you're going to do a science fiction show like this, you have to really go for it," he says.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

How does the now crowded science fiction television landscape influence what they're doing? "I don't watch *Star Trek*," Braga says. "I like to see what people are doing from a production point of view. But I try to keep myself somewhat hermetically sealed inside the universe of *The Orville*, because I know what it is and I know what it can be. I'm not necessarily interested in topical or current event themes that sometimes run through shows, I just want to do more timeless storytelling. So I don't really keep an eye on all that stuff."

MacFarlane agrees. "Certainly in the history of film and televised science fiction, there's obvious influence. But at the moment we're

really trying to do something different than what everyone else is doing. There's a space right now that goes largely unoccupied when it comes to forward-looking, uplifting, optimistic, character-based science fiction.

"I'm not really influenced by anyone who's doing anything else with the genre, on television, or in film, I'm certainly influenced by the shows that I grew up with and the classics of science fiction."

But it is this abundance of sci-fi and genre programmes that's played a part in the evolution of *The Orville*.

"You want to be able to put the best version of yourself out there," Braga says. "As wonderful as I think season two is – I hope audiences agreed – I think there was a better still version of *The Orville* to be had. And that's the one that we're putting out."

This means a *slightly* reduced episode count, albeit 10 longer instalments. "On *Star Trek* we did 26. It's hard to imagine how we did that..." Aside from length, Braga's aware of one major change in this type of storytelling.

"I'm not really influenced by anyone who's doing anything else with the genre"

"There's a famous shot from *Return Of The Jedi* where there's a big space battle at the end and there's so many ships on the screen, it's mind-blowing. You can do that now on TV because the technology exists and the artistry exists. So you can really go for it. What hasn't changed is the writing. Finding good story ideas is like mining for gold.

"There are benefits to the way TV is made today just in terms of the number of episodes. I remember thinking at the time, when *The Sopranos* first started, they were doing 13 episodes. I was so jealous. If I had the same amount of time to do 13 episodes of *Star Trek*, they would have probably been better episodes. →



NEW WORLD BUILDING

VFX producer Brooke Noska on new horizons

Episode one starts big – how long does it take to create those effects?

It usually takes, on a normal television schedule for a network, about eight to 10 weeks. For our new streaming Hulu experience, we've dedicated about 20 to 24 weeks per episode. Normally, if there wasn't a pandemic in the middle of it...

Why was the decision taken this year to go bigger and bolder?

I guess, in a sense, why not? We made the leap to streaming and it would have hindered the vision of the show and the direction that it was going if we would have just done the same thing as we did previously. So we all, as a crew, cast writers, producers, wanted to take this to the next level, dare I say a new horizon. We just wanted to see how bold we can take it. We definitely have taken every minuscule bit of time that it could possibly take to make this look awesome.

The ship itself gets a new look...

The Orville is an extra character of the ensemble – because all of these stories and all these experiences are happening on this ship, in the world that is within and around the ship. So we wanted to beef up our character as well in visual effects, because all these other storylines and characters – new and old – are being introduced with new details. We wanted to be able to incorporate some new details into our little part of the show as well.

We gather there are some incredible creatures this season.

We definitely get to dip our toes into a little bit more creature development than we have in previous seasons, which is awesome. Every visual effects team wants to get their hands on a creature. So we do dabble in those throughout the season. Even if they're not huge, big, sexy, scary. We have some cute little guys that get to come up and around throughout the season as well.

What do you hope fans take from season three?

It took us three years to get here. Hopefully everybody talks about it for just as long because it looks great, the stories are great and it's just a great show. We wanted to make sure that we were still true to ourselves and the show and made sure that it was worth the wait. And through all the difficult times that you have this shining light. Which is what *The Orville* embodies – we're a shining light of hope.

Seth MacFarlane checks out a camera shot.



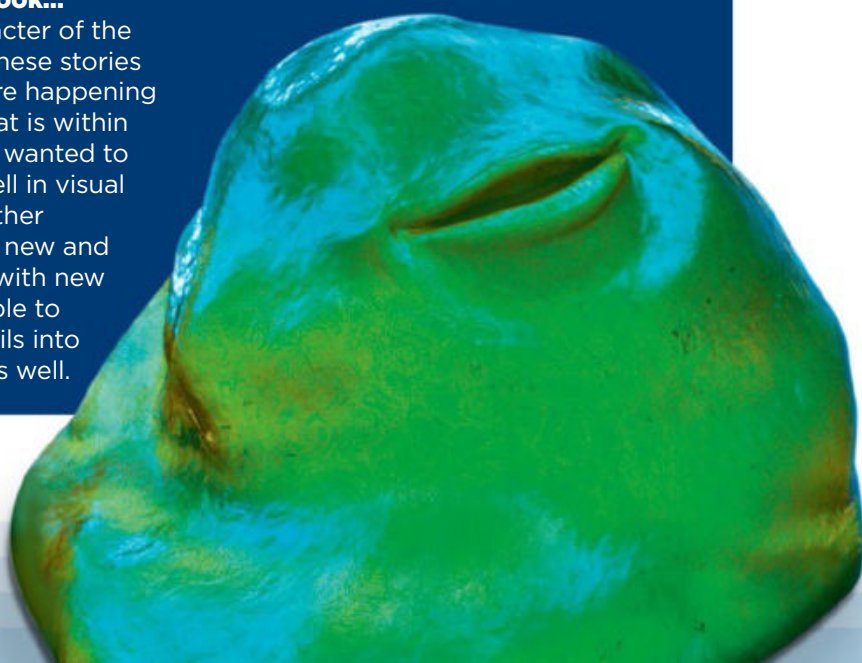
We wouldn't have been running for our lives every day."

As a result, *New Horizons* is a version of the show you've never seen before.

"Disney and Hulu really believed in this show and really gave us the resources to compete with what else is out there," MacFarlane explains. "You look at other shows they're doing like *The Mandalorian* and the Marvel offerings, they're all pretty high-end. So the fact that they trusted us not to screw this up and gave us the resources to play in that world was a really terrific thing.

"The trick is always not to let it overwhelm you; if you have the resources and you have the budget it challenges you to make sure that you're still a show about people. That's the trap that I see a lot of sci-fi shows falling into – that at the end of the day, it's not about the people.

"We do have some episodes this year that are not all big and splashy. There are a couple that I think are some of our most impactful episodes that are not necessarily enormous in





ROOM WITH A VIEW

Seth McFarlane on the groundbreaking new technology that changed *The Orville*



Lt Cmdr John LaMarr (J Lee) has a bit of a pose.

scope. But the fact that you have the tool when you need it does certainly open up the scope of storytelling. The visual effects are sort of an icing on the cake," he chuckles. "Obviously, it's a very thick icing in this case..."

The changes are not all visible, however – there's an eleventh episode that didn't quite make it.

"It was a science fiction experiment in a lot of ways," MacFarlane says. "It was cut because of Covid. Had Covid not come along we would have shot that episode, and I don't know how

Tell us about Viewscreen.

That was created by Brandon Fayette, one of our visual effects supervisors. He really is a genius. He's very much a Doc Brown inventor who has engineered, in smaller ways, various little systems that help us and make our jobs easier. Viewscreen is pretty amazing. As any sci-fi show does, we had a lot of moments in which the characters had to interact with something that wasn't there.

What Brandon did with Viewscreen was to create a system in which the camera operator could see the object in their viewfinder. So we may not be seeing it on the stage, but the camera operator is seeing it and knows exactly where it is. Through their monitor, they can see it as if it were real.

It takes the guesswork out of shooting and certainly for television and film productions, for visual effects students, I think it's going to be a little bit of a game-changer. It completely changed our process, and allowed us to do things like loose Steadicam shots when there was a serious visual effects element in the scene, and the Steadicam operator could improvise because they could see what was going on through Viewfinder.

the audience would have reacted. But that episode was a hard one to part with because it was so different."

He's not giving details away, because there's a novel of it being released alongside the series.

"I just figured, 'Hell, I gotta get it out there, the story is too interesting.' Maybe we'll shoot it at some point if we ever get the opportunity, but for now it exists purely in book form. It was definitely an outlier in the season. It was very experimental. It was very different. It still could be one of those things that in another universe was our standout breakout episode of the season. That was always my fear: did we cut the one that was the riskiest? In many ways we may have, but it was just unshootable at the time because of the shutdowns. We probably wouldn't have gotten on air until 2023 if we had tried to shoot it."

Speaking of the future, what's next for this incarnation of *The Orville*?

"Certainly I can speak for myself when I say I could do the show forever," Braga states. "I love the show. I love the type of storytelling that this show does. I've been doing this kind of storytelling for a long time, and it never really gets old. It's always challenging to try to find

“Disney and Hulu really believed in this show and gave us the resources to compete”

new science fiction concepts that can explore new themes. It's really a comfortable place for me. So I would love to do more.

"I've said it before, I'll do it as long as Seth wants to keep doing it. I just love it."

The boss, perhaps unsurprisingly, is in agreement. "It's one of the best experiences I've ever had in Hollywood and I would absolutely do more," MacFarlane says. "I love the series format more than anything, I love the freedom to tell big stories and small stories, depending on what is called for.

"The big challenge going forward is scope; the show has to make an impact to justify that scope and that budget. Certainly there are plenty of platforms that are working in that scope, there's a lot of big splashy shows out there. It just has to justify it with audience response. So if there's a demand for it, there's definitely a lot more stories to tell with these characters."

So set a course for *New Horizons* and if you like what you see, let them know... 🌌

The Orville: New Horizons is on Hulu in the US from 2 June and Star on Disney+ in the UK later this summer.

KHAN DO ATTITUDE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SANA AMANAT AND HEAD WRITER BISHA
K ALI EXPLAIN WHY BELOVED COMIC HEROINE **MS MARVEL**
BREAKS NEW GROUND AS A DISNEY+ SERIES

WORDS: TARA BENNETT







VER THE 14 YEARS THAT MARVEL STUDIOS has been making movies, and now streaming series on Disney+, its ongoing successes have fed a mission to expand the narrow definition of who a superhero can be in the cultural zeitgeist by showcasing characters like T'Challa, Carol Danvers, Shang-Chi and Makkari for a global audience.

This more purposeful approach to making sure everyone gets to see themselves within the stories it tells gets another major expansion this June with *Ms Marvel*. The series ticks a whole bunch of new storytelling "firsts", with the story of Kamala Khan (Iman Vellani), a 16-year-old Muslim, Pakistani-American superhero who stans Captain Marvel something fierce.

Based on the Eisner-nominated comic book of the same name by writer G Willow Wilson and artists Adrian Alphona and Jamie McKelvie, *Ms Marvel* aims to tell the relatable and smaller-scale story of a misfit teen trying to juggle her culture, her religion and social status after she gains powers that she assumes will solve all her problems. Of course, they don't...

It's a story that instantly connected *Ms Marvel*'s head writer, comedian Bisha K Ali, from the moment she picked up issue one in London's Orbital Comics. "I remember really vividly seeing Kamala in the comic," Ali tells *SFX* in her Los Angeles office. "It was a deeply

personal moment and a deeply evocative moment for me just thinking back on it. Fast forward [eight] years and suddenly I'm really a big part of this story. It's really astounding."

A self-proclaimed nerd, Ali got her love of comics from her Pakistani mum, who started her own collection back in the '70s. "We're a part of nerd culture and fandom culture. I was raised on comics. I remember sitting in Hounslow Library, where they had a bananas collection of comic books. I read *Preacher* and *Sandman* way too young," she laughs.

Age-inappropriate it may have been, but it helped to lay the groundwork for her love of the medium, which she then paired with her career pursuit as a TV writer, and which eventually got her a job in the writers' room of *Loki*. Under the guidance of head writer Michael Waldron and creative executive Kevin Wright, Ali says she flourished as the geek who heatedly debated with her peers about Nexus events and whether or not there was a heat

Kamala Khan's new powers start to kick in...

...and she starts to show off. As you would.



Iman Vellani
as Ms Marvel
with Matt Lintz
as Bruno.



Jellyfish
gloves are
very much in
for 2022.

death at the end of the universe.

"There's a real joy to be part of that and actually impacting how their stories come out," Ali says of her time in the room and getting to know the Marvel Studios creative process. "It was very fun to be engaged in those conversations. That collaboration certainly led to me being able to look at *Ms Marvel*."

Working among the first wave of Marvel Studios' streaming writing rooms, Ali says that as "the nosy-ass nerd" she heard rumours of a *Ms Marvel* show and went to Wright with a request. "I was like, 'Look, there's no planet where you guys are not thinking about doing something with *Ms Marvel*. It's one of your most popular comic books. If you don't get me that meeting, you will meet the heat death at

“The visual language of the show was really important to us, making sure it had a freshness”

the end of the universe!" she jokes.

Ali's name was already in the conversational mix for the show, and she got to pitch her take on an adaptation. "I knew going into the pitch that it was about laying out what my vision would be, what the core tenets of that vision are, especially as it comes to the character herself," she explains. "I'm always going to approach character first, spectacle second. And spectacle is inherently tied to character – otherwise, I don't want to do it. That was my North Star for the pitch. I knew, having worked on *Loki*, how much stuff changes once you're in the weeds."

After being named head writer in 2019, Ali staffed a diverse room of writers, and collaborated with creative executive Brad Winderbaum, *Ms Marvel* co-creator Sana Amanat and directors Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah to figure out how to translate the beloved comic to the screen in the best way possible.

She says that an important decision was to retain the small footprint of Kamala Khan's teenage life in Jersey City, New Jersey. "I believe the internal to be epic," she says of allowing the show's focus to be the ordinary-to-extraordinary life of Khan. "Getting a chance to display that in a way that is different and new is very exciting.

"The pleasure of doing an origin story in a TV series is the luxury of time. It's the time she has with her family and the ecosystem that she has around her. I don't know how many of the other [superheroes] got to have that time. There's so much to tell in these comics because there is so much density, from the layering in a panel to the entirety of it, and being able to have this luxury of time."

POWER PACK

As a long-time Marvel Comics editor and one of the co-creators of *Ms Marvel*, Sana Amanat is the rare creative who has gotten to travel with a comic from the page to an adaptation at Marvel Studios. She tells *SFX* that she joined the show as the writers' room was wrapping up, to help figure out how to affordably bring the distinct visual style of the book to a series.

"Obviously this is very personal to me, and I'm very excited about the fact that they wanted to tell Kamala's story in such a big way and that they wanted me to be a part of that story and a part of that process," Amanat says of her executive producer role.

"Our first big challenge, which the directors really took seriously was, 'How do you make this feel like the comic and yet still live in the MCU?' The visual language of the show was really important to us, making sure that it had a freshness and a bounce to it that felt a little bit more like what the comics did. There's a lot of funny things happening in the background of the panels of the comics that we wanted to try to not necessarily duplicate exactly, but get the spirit of it."

Amanat says she's very happy with the way Ali kept the series respectful of the comics while very personal in scope and storytelling. →





Adil El Arbi,
Bilall Fallah
and Sana
Amanat.

“Bisha did a great job of really putting the essence of issues one through 40 into the series,” she enthuses. “There’s so many different aspects of what I think make the comic really special that have been adapted to this six-episode series that is effectively the story of Kamala across all of the different issues that we’ve told.”

She continues: “There are some sci-fi, fantastical elements to the show, as expected, but it’s actually quite grounded. Overall, I think the conflicts and the issues, and even the action sequences, just feel a little bit more grounded and more like Kamala and her world – intentionally, because she’s 16. And while we do go to big places in the show – and to really unexpected *actual* places – it’s in a way that makes sense for who Kamala is. The series gives us a sense of her discovery of herself, and who she’s supposed to become. I think that’s why it works so well. But it’s certainly a ground-side view of the MCU, and all seen →

Looks too good to be true. Can this be real...?



Ms Marvel has a bit of a Spidey moment.



IMAN VELLANI

AS KAMALA KHAN / MS MARVEL

From high school grad to the MCU in just one audition

Kamala was your first audition. How did you land her?

⚡ I got the casting call through a WhatsApp forward, which is like the Brownest way this could have happened. My aunt was like, "You've read all the comics, just go for it." I sent my headshot and a very academic résumé. They sent back three scenes. I was like, "I know exactly which comic books these are from!" I was freaking out and I didn't want to do it because I was honestly scared. But I knew my 10-year-old self was gonna hate me, so I did it for her. I sent [a self-tape] in. I think a day or two after I got a call. They're like, "Get a lawyer. We need you to come to LA."

How was that experience?

⚡ It was the greatest time of my life. I am obsessed with people who work at Marvel, so just seeing so many people with Marvel Studios hats and jackets was like sensory overload in the best way possible. I went home the happiest girl in the world. They sent me one email to come back, but then the pandemic happened. Four months go by and I have to accept university offers. I was freaking out because I'm like, "I don't think I want to do anything else now. What if I don't get it? I can't just go back to being a normal kid. I've gotten this little glimpse of what it could be like!"

Captain Marvel is Kamala's hero and Brie Larson is your co-star in *The Marvels*. When did you first meet her and do the two of you talk much?

⚡ I got cast on June 24. Two days after, I get a text from [casting director] Sarah Finn saying, "Brie wants to meet you." I was like, "What?" The next day, we did a little Zoom call. It was very, very nice to have her hold my hand throughout everything. I very much made sure I was using her as much as I could, because she made herself so available for me. There's a sense of loneliness that comes with just being the only superhero on set. She definitely dealt with that on

Captain Marvel. For me, I was the only person in a superhero costume, which is a little scary. Everyone is gonna look at you when you're wearing the shiny piece of Spandex. It's a little intimidating and you feel insecure. You're in this funky costume doing these weird hand things. Brie was telling me that she's gone through the same thing. I was like, "Great. Not alone!" She said, "This is normal, and you're going to have a lot of body pain!"

Was the comic book run important to you?

⚡ The G Willow Wilson run was a huge inspiration for our show. Honestly, I carried that comic around everywhere with me. I have it memorised at this point! Not even just rereading, but holding it with that classic cover. I never let go of that comic, because it means the world to me. I asked Kevin [Feige] to sign it when he came to set. He did not. He was like, "That's so weird!"

Because of that, did the change in Kamala's powers bother you?

⚡ That's a good question. I was surprised when they told me. Obviously, I am very married to the original comic run. But certain things have to be reimaged to fit a larger scale, and this fitted how

the direction of the MCU is going right now. The themes of the comics have always been about identity and marrying all the things that make Kamala Kamala. She's Pakistani. She's Muslim. She's a superhero nerd. There's too much, and that's real life. You can't just identify yourself as one thing. Those core themes from the comics and that tone is very much prevalent in our show as well. I think that's what should matter.

Do you feel like much of your own life is in Kamala's story?

⚡ I honestly felt like I kind of lived Kamala's life minus the superpower part. I'm a huge Marvel fan. My family dynamic was very similar, so doing those scenes, I felt very at home doing that. Adil [El Arbi] and Bilal [Fallah], who directed episode one and six, they would have very regular calls with me before I moved to Atlanta, just talking about my life and what high school was like for me, and my relationship with boys and teachers. I appreciated that so much, because it's the worst thing in the world when 40-year-olds are writing a script for 15-year-olds, and acting like they know what they sound like. They don't. They are far removed from that type of world. These guys really made an effort to share my voice and make my voice Kamala's voice.

As a Marvel Studios fan, who is your go-to Avenger?

⚡ I'm a huge, huge Iron Man fan. I know Kamala is more Captain Marvel, but I was very much asking for more Iron Man references in there. Like, "I think she needs an Iron Man action figure, more Iron Man." There was a point where we got to too much Iron Man, that was the note from Kevin!

Iron Man is one of the best MCU origin stories. Did you revisit it in order to prep for Kamala's?

⚡ The first thing I did when I got cast was watch *Iron Man* again. It's like my comfort movie. Any big milestone we would hit in the show, whether it was filming the

scene where Kamala gets her costume or her powers, I would watch *Iron Man*. It was my reminder that this character exists in the same universe as Tony Stark, which was just the coolest thing in the world for me. Honestly, it is very fun to just create this story. This is something new for the MCU and it's also a side of the MCU we haven't seen before, the perspective of a teenage kid who's obsessed with these Avengers.

Iron Man wasn't mainstream before his movie. Do you feel Ms Marvel has that same underdog status?

⚡ Kamala has a lot of self-doubt and imposter syndrome. It's a really fun thing to play because I was on a very similar path. I came from high school to the Marvel Universe. It's like I was given the ultimate key, so I was dealing with a lot of imposter syndrome. Being

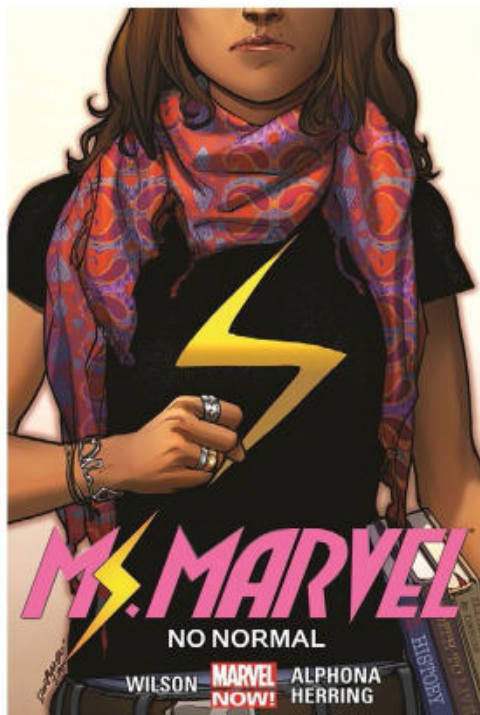
“It was the greatest time of my life. I am obsessed with people who work at Marvel”

the first of anything is very scary. The MCU hasn't seen a character like this before. With Kamala and me, we have a wonderful support system. Her family is her rock and her friends in Bruno (Matt Lintz) and Nakia (Yasmeen Fletcher) in the show are the people that she goes to where she can be herself and where she can get her confidence from. For me, it's also my family and my friends. I think it's really awesome. Ultimately, we just see her become a badass superhero.

You're also a big cinephile. Give us three recommendations.

⚡ *Harold And Maude* is one of my favourite movies. I'm gonna put *Mamma Mia!* on that list too. And *Boy*, Taika Waititi's movie. [The main character] similarly lives in his own head in a fantastical world and has to deal with a lot of family drama, so that for sure I rewatched.





“We’ve never had a show of this magnitude that is representing a Brown and Muslim family”

through Kamala’s lens. That worked well in the comics, and we wanted to continue to do that in the show.”

That said, a big part of Khan’s story is the rich fantasy world she escapes to as a refuge from the pressures of high school, the demands of her Pakistani family and the temptations of Western society that are in opposition to her Muslim faith. Amanat says the series keeps all of those conflicts in play, and uses Khan’s artistic retreats on-screen to see inside her imaginative head. “It’s understanding that Kamala is someone who does live in this fantasy, and does live in this alternate reality that she’s constantly trying to aspire to be, which Captain Marvel represents, and that’s told

Let’s face it, we’ve all been there growing up...



through the visual language of how she looks at the world. It was really, really fun to explore, and our entire team helped us to develop it.”

In keeping with that visual language will be the way that Khan’s powers are expressed. They are not exactly the same as they are in the comics. The books blame a Terrigen Mist for turning the teenager into a shapeshifter who can polymorph her appendages. But the series will tweak her power origins and also the way they look. Despite rumblings from readers after seeing the series trailer, Amanat is adamant that it’s not really a big deal.

“I think the essence of the messaging is all there – we’re just manifesting it in a different way,” she says. “With the powers themselves, the ‘embiggen’ fists are still there. The way that her powers are comported and used are very,

It’s not quite Catwoman’s bike, but it’ll do.

Things are kicking off for Ms Marvel at last.





very similar to the overall look in the comics. I think people will be satisfied. I don't think there's any powers that look like this that are out there. And they do look weird and wonky," she laughs.

Ali stresses that care for the source material and keeping Khan's journey relatable was paramount for everyone working on the show. "All the writers involved in this, all the directors, and all the cast feel this love for this character," Ali says of Khan. "And beyond just the character, we know what this show means. We know. I know. I've been hunting for this my entire life."

As part of a creative team who see themselves in Khan's story, Ali says they also feel the incredible weight of getting her right in this medium, but also making a story that genuinely changes how Desi people and Muslim people are portrayed. "We suffer the consequences of bad misrepresentation. We know. We out here," she emphasises with a knowing smile.

"It affects our lives. It affects our families. It affects our careers and everything in our world. It's not like I'm oblivious to it. It's inherently part of my lived experience. For me, and I can't speak for anybody else, there's a feeling of a great sense of responsibility around it. But also, the counterbalance to that is we can't represent a billion people."

And she believes that making stories like Khan's available on a scale that only the likes of

Marvel Studios can reach can really make a difference. "Once you start seeing yourself through the lens of these individuals and through their perspective, it will start becoming a lot more everyday and normal for people who don't know our lives which is why representation is incredible," Amanat says.

"We've never had a show of this magnitude that is representing a Brown and Muslim family and a Brown and Muslim community. Ever. Now we're doing it. Now we're telling the story about a girl who happens to be a young woman, who happens to be Muslim and South Asian and she's a superhero."

Ali says she hopes *Ms. Marvel* is the first of many doors to open for these kinds of stories. "The goal for me in terms of the media landscape is ubiquity. Once there's loads of us, we can all be telling different stories. But there's so much pressure on this, because this is the one, baby!"

"I felt a deep sense of responsibility, not only to the comics, but also the fact of what we're doing in the media landscape felt really important. What I had to do was put that down for a moment so we could focus on crafting the story. That was the battle that I was going through in that process. And I believe that we did." ●

Ms. Marvel premieres on Disney+ on 8 June, with new episodes becoming available weekly, every Friday.

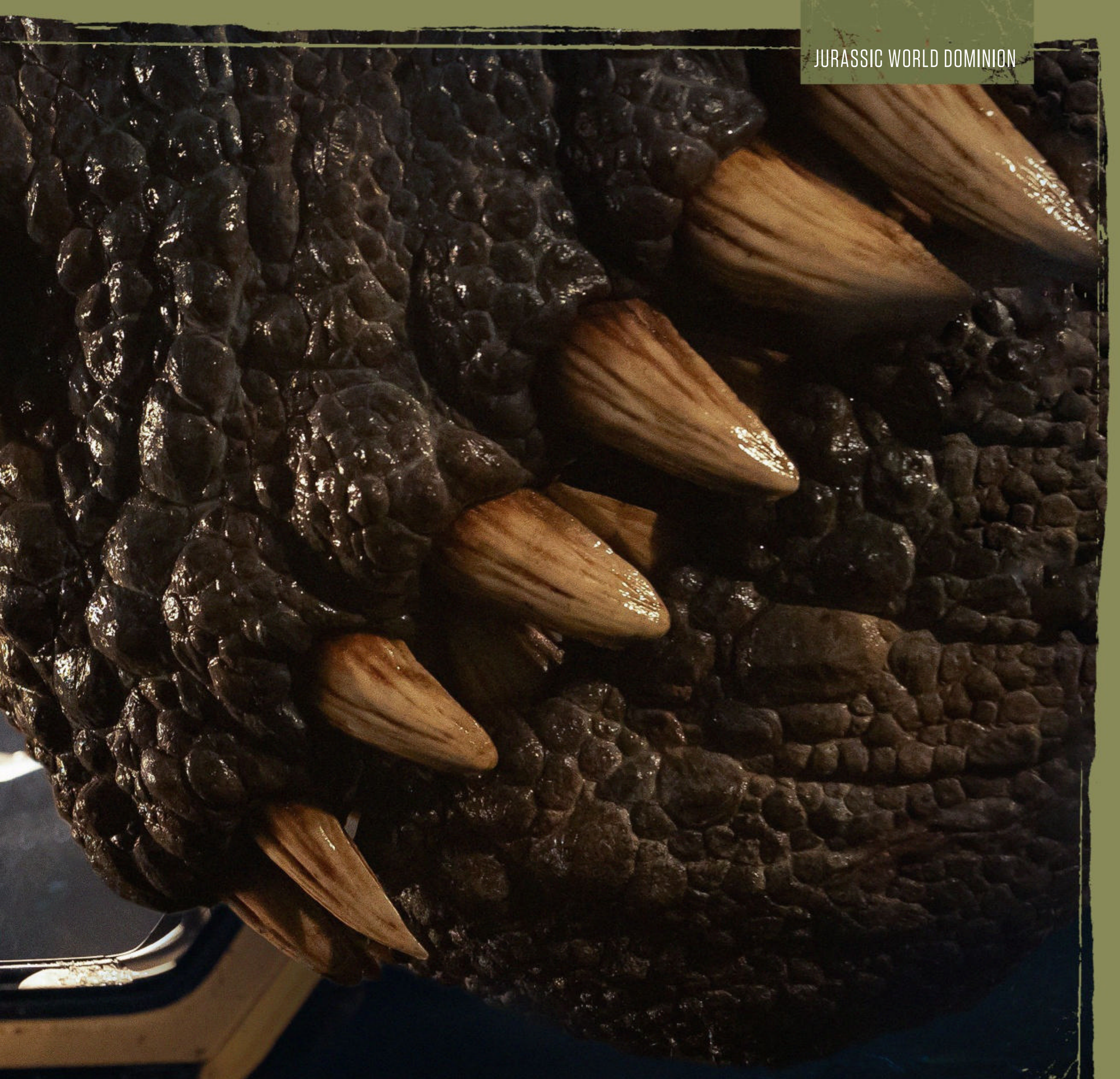


JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION



WHEN DINOSAURS

FIRST AN ISLAND, THEN THE ENTIRE PLANET. **JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION**



RULE THE EARTH

BRINGS THE DINO-DRAMA TO A CLOSE. FOR NOW... WORDS: **BRYAN CAIRNS**

J

JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION – the conclusion of the *Jurassic World* saga – could have simply could have simply rehashed the formulas of its successors, that gobbled up over \$2.9 billion at the worldwide box office. But that kind of lacklustre and uninspired vision is what causes franchises to go extinct.

Instead, director Colin Trevorrow is taking *Dominion*'s dinosaurs out of their familiar island habitat and plonking them onto a global stage, where they roam the land and somehow co-exist with mankind. Here's the good news for moviegoers: something goes terribly wrong. That's evident when the gigantic sea-based Mosasaurus capsizes a fishing vessel. This science thriller, however, isn't just a dinosaurs-gone-wild escapade. It's also a story about parenting, philosophical ideals and grandeur. But, don't worry, big lizards still wreak havoc.

"To me, *Dominion* is not just capping off a trilogy," Trevorrow tells *SFX*. "It's telling the story that feels like the end of a six-movie cycle and honouring all of the characters. It's not as much dramatic storylines. It's not really that kind of franchise. It's more scientific ideas, questions that have been posed by author Michael Crichton from the very beginning.

"To me, it needed to be a movie about genetic power, the danger of genetic power on a larger scale than just specifically, 'Oh, we could make dinosaurs.' This is real technology that is affecting our daily lives and is going to affect our future. What more can we say? How much more can we warn each other that this is an extraordinary powerful science that we need to respect?"

BACK TO BASICS

For anyone still living in the Cretaceous Period, here's a quick recap of the events of the previous chapter, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*. Animal behaviourist Owen (Chris Pratt) and Dinosaur Protection Group leader Claire (Bryce Dallas Howard) teamed up to stop a greedy corporation relocating the prehistoric creatures from Isla Nublar to the Lockwood Estate in America. There, dinosaurs were being auctioned off to the highest bidder – until the vicious critters escaped and ripped people to shreds. They were last seen fleeing into the night. In addition, Claire and Owen became guardians to a genetically-cloned young girl named Maisie (Isabella Sermon).

Dominion finds the planet in a delicate balance. Dinosaurs aren't necessarily



Yes, that's it, bravely hide behind the young girl.

stampeding through cities chomping on human-sized snacks, but they remain incredibly dangerous and unpredictable.

"The intention at the beginning of the movie is humans trying to figure out, 'How can we move forward?'" says Trevorrow. "We can't put it back in the box. We are going to have to live with the consequences of the horrible mistakes that we have made, much like all of us in the world right now. So now they are trying to figure out what the new equilibrium is, what the new dynamic is going to be."

An epic ensemble joins the aforementioned Pratt and Howard. Daniella Pineda and Justice Smith return as Zia and Franklin. New cast

members DeWanda Wise, Mamoudou Athie and Campbell Scott enter the picture as Kayla, Ramsay and Dr Lewis Dodgson. The major hype, however, revolves around the legacy *Jurassic Park* characters – Dr Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum), Dr Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern) and Dr Alan Grant (Sam Neill) – once again reporting for duty. Although Goldblum briefly popped by in *Fallen Kingdom*, Trevorrow promises a more substantial and pivotal storyline for the trio here.

"I was very conscious that the audience would just not buy it if the OGs showed up without a genuine purpose and reason to be there," Trevorrow explains. "In the first movie



"I've had it up to here. Ha!" (Glub glub).



Ellie gets friendly with a Nasutoceratops.

DINO-RIDER

Chris Pratt talks dino love, action sequences
and Chris Hemsworth**Where do we find Owen at the beginning of *Dominion*?**

● Owen is living a little bit off the grid, because they have taken responsibility for Maisie. Over the course of this film, there's a particular reason why she is so wanted by the baddies. Claire and Owen are really struggling with how to be parents, how to parent a teenager, how to keep her safe and how to keep her protected from the truth. Meanwhile, we are both doing some pretty badass shit like wrangling dinosaurs on horseback, or breaking into buildings to free baby dinosaurs. Claire and Owen are living this dual life of failing to be parents, but excelling at being dinosaur helpers.

What have you enjoyed about the relationship between Owen and Blue, and how has it evolved?

● Blue, too, is a parent, so there is a Baby Blue. She is still dangerous and still deadly. She's growing, as well. It's been cool through the course of the past seven years, over these three films, to have an ongoing relationship with this CG dinosaur. On paper, it seems silly, and I suppose in some regards it is. It is fun, and hopefully not too campy. But it's also kind of meaningful.

The legacy cast is back in action. As an actor, what was it like being on-set with them?

● It was unreal. It was surreal, in a word. Getting to work with these guys is a kind of milestone, one you didn't even know that you were ever going to be in the ballpark of trying to hit. These are characters, actors, that I loved before I even knew I was going to be an actor. To be on-screen with them is really special. Even more special is to get close to them. You always get close to people when you're filming, but when you film under Covid in a foreign land, you get really close. That is the most special part for me, becoming friends with these folks and now being their peer. If I called, they would pick up the phone, and likewise.

Was there any particular sequence that blew your mind?

● We have one action sequence that is unlike anything I have ever seen before. It's a 12- or 13-minute action sequence. There's a dinosaur chase on motorcycles that resembles the dinosaur motorcycle beat from the first one, but it's driven by a plot that makes sense. It's not gratuitous. It actually makes sense and honours what was great in the previous films. And we did one sequence, which to me was one of the most beautiful things I have not only ever been a part of, but maybe that I have ever seen on film, where Owen is chasing down a pack of dinosaurs on horseback up in Kamloops, Canada. It's meant to be snowy America. It's so gorgeous. It's like *Yellowstone* meets a dinosaur movie.

As a huge fan of the original *Jurassic Park*, are you proud that this franchise could prove to be a seminal moment for someone else's childhood?

● That makes me feel really good and really proud of it. It has been an extraordinary run. I don't know if it's coming with age or what, but I am getting this wave of sentimentality recently as I approach the end of *Jurassic* and as I am off shooting the end of *Guardians Of The Galaxy*. It's a lot of work. I'm grateful to have been on this journey and I'm really proud of all the hard work that I have put in, and that everyone else has put in.

Next up for you is *Thor: Love And Thunder*. How much fun was it bouncing Star-Lord off Thor?

● I love being able to work with Chris Hemsworth. He is like Thor in real life. He's the sweetest dude. Super-funny. Works so hard. It was great. I loved every minute of shooting it. I'm so grateful that they brought us along. It was neat to see him bring this to Australia and shoot it there, with all of his fellow countrymen. And with director Taika Waititi, who is just outrageous. His style is so unique.

we made, *Jurassic World*, if those three happened to have visited the park on the very day that it collapsed, I wouldn't have bought it. Likewise, in the second film, there was a narrative happening where it was important that our new characters be given the space to grow.

"In this film, because there's a larger story about kinetic power, Ellie Sattler's skills as a paleobotanist, Grant's expertise as a paleontologist, and Malcolm's expertise as a chaotician are all required for the story for different reasons and in different ways, just like they were in the first movie," he continues. "I didn't want to do this until I could give them arcs that they deserved."

Of course, it's the dinosaurs that are at the heart of any *Jurassic* entry. Audiences cheer when the T-rex stomps into frame or those vicious Velociraptors scuttle around before descending on their prey. This time around, there's no genetically-engineered hybrids, such as the Indominus Rex or the Indoraptor, in sight. Screen time will focus on real dinosaurs that have already made appearances, as well as adding new scientifically accurate species, including the massive, long-necked →



Owen: always a hit with the birds.

FINDING A WAY

Jeff Goldblum talks returning to the *Jurassic Park* franchise

It's been almost 30 years since *Jurassic Park*. How surprised were you to get that call for *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*?

● I think I was surprised. How did that happen? I'm trying to remember. Wait a minute. "Oh, they're doing a second *Jurassic World* movie. And they want you in it?" Surprised and thrilled. I couldn't have had a better time on the first and second ones. I was very happy to do it. It was nice to breathe through Ian Malcolm's nostrils again. He's an interesting cat.

Malcolm has always raised concerns about saving the dinosaurs. Now that they are roaming free in *Dominion*, how much is he thinking "I told you so?"

● I can't give too much away, but I don't think he rests too long on the "I told you so." I think throughout these last couple of decades, since the incidents in Isla Nublar and Isla Sorna, that was a life-changing, death-defying experience. He's not only proudly more present and appreciative of life itself, but I think he's more passionately committed to doing what he can to help our species along. It's a crucial point, and seeing what I can do, given my specialty in chaos theory and my brush with dinosaurs, I'm doing what I can to sort out the bad people who want to use technology unwisely. I'm seeing if I can add my two cents, so that things get guided along a bit more wisely. I'm more committed with that than ever.

What can you tease about what brings the legacy characters back together?

● There is some ignorance afoot with the use of the technology. Malcolm places himself somewhere near those goings-on

so I might impact them. We all start collaborating before we intersect and coincide with Owen and Claire for a related reason.

How did it feel sharing screen time with Sam Neill and Laura Dern again?

● Oh, it was absolutely amazing. They are two of our finest actors. They are spectacular people. I adore them. It was great spending more time with them than I have in the last couple of decade. It's fun and wildly trippy and amazing being with them. Seeing them recreate their parts, and to take the characters further right there with me, was thrilling.

The encounter between Malcolm and the T-rex in *Jurassic Park* proved memorable. What can you tease about his run-in with REXY this time?

● They were all looking at something in the trailer. We all have our encounter with it. We all have our individual moments with a few different things, that are as exciting and scary and suspenseful as I have ever seen in any of the movies.

The trailer also finds Malcolm asking, "Bigger. Why do they always have to go bigger?" What's it like being the character who gets the most quotable one-liners?

● Emily Carmichael, along with director Colin Trevorrow, wrote this script. They not only came up with a good story, but clever lines. Ian Malcolm has been a rich character since the books. He winds up getting to pop off an interesting remark or two. Making the most of them is my challenge... and I did my best.

Dr Ian Malcolm orders a quick Big Mac for the trip.



T-rex: a real creature feature.



The Pyraptor just wants a bit of seed.



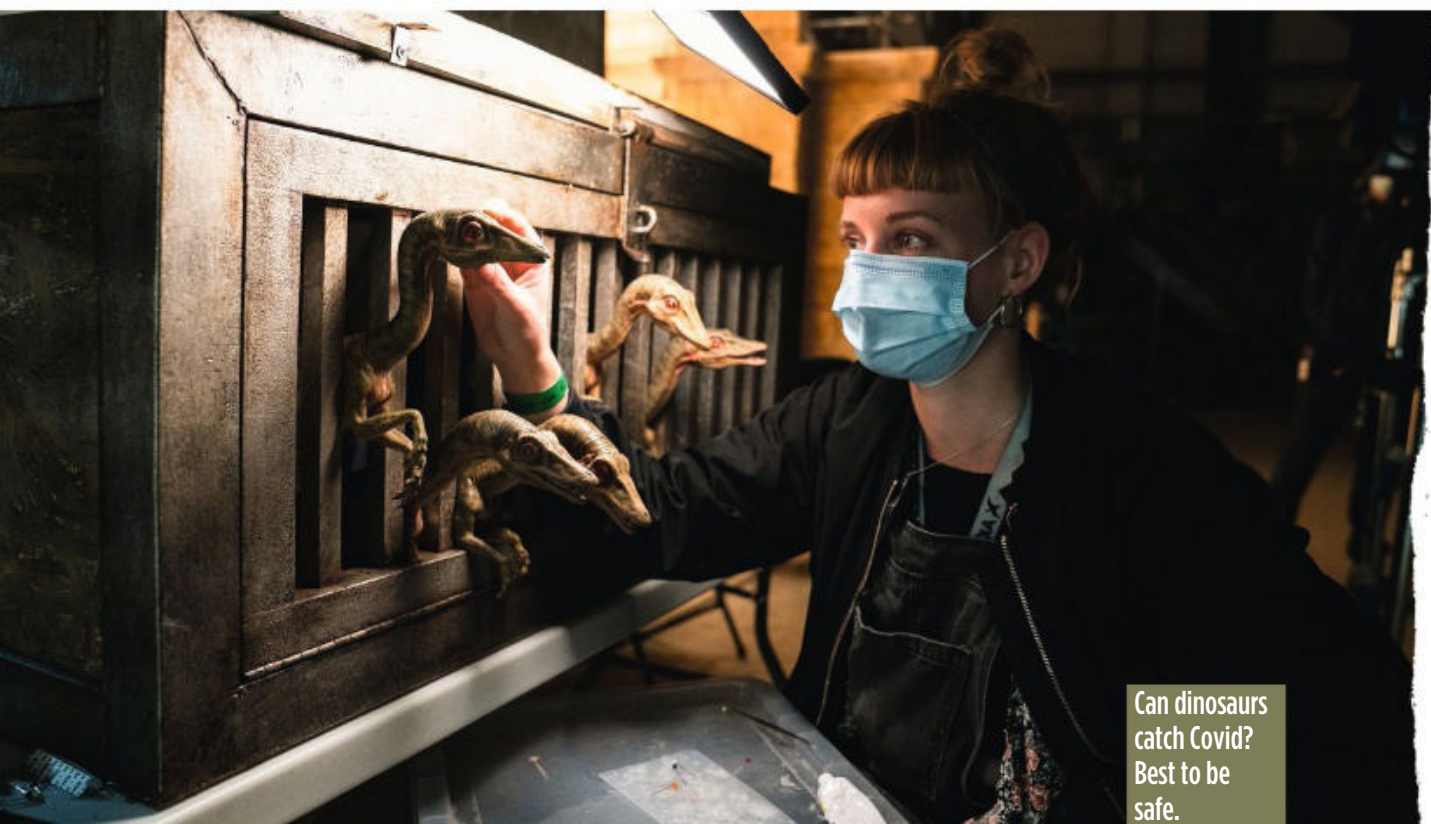
Let's hope they get an arm bitten off.

Dreadnoughtus, the feathered Pyraptors, the savage Atrociraptors and the winged Quetzalcoatlus. Meanwhile, apex predator the Giganotosaurus is being touted as the movie's Big Bad.

"The idea of hybrids had narratively run its course after the second film," Trevorrow says. "It didn't fit into the reality of the environment we threw our characters in. It's so devoted to the real science that their number one priority would be to make the most paleontologically correct dinosaurs as possible. They would not consider making hybrids there. They would look down upon it.

"I actually like being able to give the characters in the films different perspectives and points of view about dinosaurs and how they should be treated in this new reality," he adds. "The ones in this film, the good guys and the bad guys, one thing they do agree on is that dinosaurs are real, and they should be recreating them as accurately as they can."

One *Jurassic* staple sticking around is the T-rex, affectionately nicknamed "Rexy" by

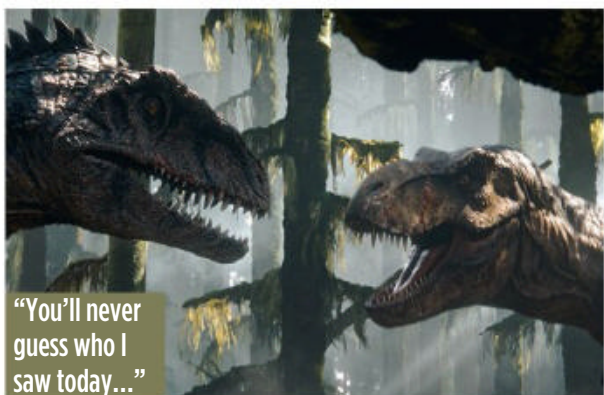


Can dinosaurs catch Covid? Best to be safe.



Chris pops the questions to director Colin Trevorrow.

fans. Established as the main antagonist in *Jurassic Park*, she's inadvertently saved everyone's bacon on numerous occasions. Most notably, REXY was released from captivity in *Jurassic World* to take down the Indominus Rex. As one of the beasts that disappeared into the wilds after the Lockwood Estate incident, she's set to reappear in *Dominion*. A Steven Spielberg-esque sequence in the movie's teaser finds her being chased by a helicopter in an attempt to tranquilise her. That leads REXY to crashing a drive-in cinema.



"You'll never guess who I saw today..."

Trevorrow says the goal of the scene was to "instil the magic of dinosaurs amid objects they're unfamiliar with. It was juxtaposed against dinosaurs 65 million years ago in an environment that had no technology, no outside distractions... nothing that wasn't naturally there," he explains.

"To be able to contrast their natural environment with this dinosaur on the run from this helicopter, who is crashing into an environment full of people and cars and a projector showing something else. I can



Snowy Canada stands in for the US.

imagine how confusing it would have been. That was the purpose.

"We all have a real love for the T-rex, as if she's a true character," he adds. "So it was important for me throughout the course of these movies to take her on a journey and hopefully really make the audience want her to find peace. We want her to find a home. She feels like she has been constantly displaced, time and time again. For her to find a family and sense of belonging is what I want."

Fan-favourite Velociraptor Blue also re-enters the fold. As the plucky and loyal carnivore raised by Owen, Blue captured everyone's hearts – especially after she proved instrumental in taking down the Indominus Rex. Blue can be seen racing across the snowy terrains with her youngling in the *Dominion* trailer. Trevorrow reports that they tried to create a special bond between Owen and Blue which "was as close to real as anyone might have with their dog or animal that they love."

"What I didn't know was whether people were going to accept it," he reflects. "It's a stretch. I understood how there could be a school of thought that feels *Jurassic World* is

"I really did want to make a series of movies that parents my age could take kids to"

just another version of *Jurassic Park*. To me, it really wasn't. I know it seems like that on the surface, but we took steps forward in the audiences' suspension of disbelief that I found to be pretty bold, and it could have been a disaster. That was one of them.

"I thought kids really connected with that relationship," he adds. "It's obviously a very strong element in the story, an important part of the story. There are some things that take on a life of their own."

The original *Jurassic Park* stands out as a movie-going touchstone for Trevorrow, which is why he's so intent on replicating the same exhilarating experience for audiences.

"I really did want to make a series of movies for a new generation, that parents my age could take their kids to," Trevorrow says. "I feel like we have done it. I knew that in doing so there would be some purists, like myself, who would look at the new films and be like, 'Ehhh... I'm more for *Jurassic Park*.'"

"I acknowledge it," he concludes. "Yet I hope, especially with this one, that the audiences will feel like they understand, 'Oh, I see what he was trying to do here. I see what he was reaching for.'"

Jurassic World Dominion is in cinemas from 10 June.

THE BOYS

EDGE OF



GETTY

GLORY



FANS OF **THE BOYS** SHOULD BE CAREFUL WHAT THEY WISH FOR... SHOWRUNNER ERIC KRIPKE PREPARES TO UNLEASH SEASON THREE

WORDS: **BRYAN CAIRNS**

N

EVER DARE, double-dare or triple-dare Eric Kripke. Ever since the *Supernatural* creator landed the gig as showrunner of *The Boys* – the

TV series about corrupt superheroes and the covert vigilante group intent on exposing their dirty little secrets – comic book fans have “stone-cold dared” him to adapt the notorious Herogasm arc for the small screen.

The depraved annual event follows the Supes blowing off steam with a weekend orgy of sex, drugs and violence. Well, fans experienced their own happy endings when Kripke announced that Herogasm would indeed finally be, uh, coming in *The Boys*’ third season.

“I am never one to shy away from a challenge,” Kripke tells *SFX*. “Honestly, the truth is I didn’t think we were on stable enough ground as a definitive hit yet, because we hadn’t really aired, to be able to say to Sony and Amazon, ‘I want an episode set at the most extreme orgy you have ever seen’. But we wrote season two, and season one aired and was a hit, and season two was an even bigger hit. So, as we were gearing up for season three, I distinctly remember the day I turned to my writers and said, ‘We are doing it. This is it. This is the season we are doing Herogasm’.

“Does it encapsulate the tone of the show this season?” he continues. “I don’t know if it does. It’s a massive orgy and a hilarious, weird setting for the show. It’s infamous among fans of *The Boys*. One thing we managed is to get several genuinely emotional, heartbreaking scenes in that orgy. If there is anything that *The Boys* does well, we can break your heart in the middle of an orgy!”

POWER THEMES

Debauchery. Exploding heads. Speedboats plowing into a whale. Dolphins being ejected from a vehicle and pulverised. *The Boys* has brought us plenty of grotesque, outrageous WTF images that shock – in the best possible way. It’s easy to imagine Kripke and the writers laughing maniacally as they cook up these batshit moments. And there’s even more to come, almost immediately, in the third-season opener.

“One tease I can say is, in the first 15 minutes of episode one we have not just the craziest

Billy Butcher and Homelander have a chat.

sequence we have ever done, but the craziest sequence pretty much anybody has ever done,” Kripke says. “It’s so jaw-droppingly insane. It’s so much fun. It’s the best job I have ever had, to think about this stuff. It’s always the frosting on the cake.

“If we are spending three weeks to break an episode, we spend two-and-a-half banging down on character, plot and emotion. Then, only when all the painful work is done, we take a break – it’s almost like a wine spritzer – and take a couple of days to say, ‘Now, let’s all think of the craziest shit we can to lay in on top of the hard work we had already done.’”

Season three of *The Boys* picks up a year after the Stormfront debacle, where the rogue Nazi hero was heat-visioned to a crisp by Homelander’s son. In the aftermath, Billy Butcher (Karl Urban) and co are no longer on the run and hiding. Hughie (Jack Quaid)

landed a job at the Federal Bureau of Superhuman Affairs. His romance with Starlight (Erin Moriarty) is in full bloom. A-Train (Jessie T Usher) has become a spokesman for an energy drink. Homelander (Antony Starr) remains the Vought Corporation’s golden boy. And Butcher, presumably after injecting himself with the super-serum Compound V, somehow now possesses his own superhuman abilities.

“Power became a really important theme this season,” Kripke says. “What does that mean specifically for each character?

How do they successfully use it, or, more often, fall prey to it? This time it was a lot of exploration of how each character would react if they were given a very different kind of

power. Butcher has this very literal power and becomes as bad as the thing he’s hunting. Hughie, for the first time in his life, has a federal job and people listen to him. What





does that mean? Starlight is becoming as popular in the Seven as Homelander. When all of our characters are given the thing they thought they wanted, what happens?

"The other thing I would say is Soldier Boy really lends himself to an interesting discussion of toxic masculinity," he continues, namechecking a new addition to the character roster. "So often, power means fronting as this macho illusion that never existed.

"Especially in the States, we put so much stock in this Western cowboy, John Wayne, Marlboro Man myth. It's such bullshit. It's raised generation after generation of fucked-up men, who can't live up to it. It's been interesting to explore that through Soldier Boy. What is that notion of power that men are supposed to carry, but has done as much damage to our society as anything else?"

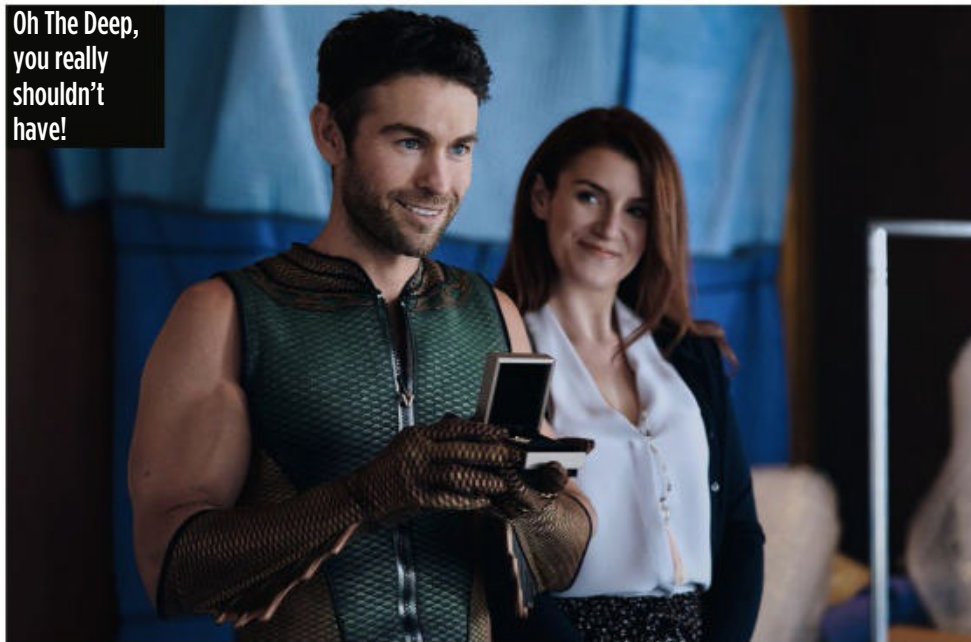
The season three premiere, aptly titled "Payback", introduces the eponymously titled original team of superheroes dating back generations. Its roster consists of Soldier Boy, Stormfront, Eagle the Archer, Tek Knight,

Gunpowder, Swatto, the Crimson Countess and Mind-Droid. Kripke refers to Payback as "the Seven before the Seven" and notes that the group "will fill in all the blanks on the history of Vought.

"Soldier Boy, who came out of the Second World War, was the first famous superhero and has lived through decades of stuff like Black history," he explains. "Through him, we were able to explore that history. Through Payback, we were able to explore what the superteam was like, and what they are like today now that the spotlight has passed them by, and they are on the outs. I am fascinated by the concept of celebrity. Those characters are so desperate to get back into the spotlight and it's always so unhealthy. It's a lot of where Payback is today; how one day you might be really powerful, but that's fleeting."

Supernatural's Jensen Ackles portrays this supersoldier from the '40s, who serves as a Captain America parody. Depicted in the comic books as cowardly and obsessed with joining the Seven, the character has bulked up and

Oh The Deep,
you really
shouldn't
have!



Hughie's got a
proper job and
everything.
Fancy.



gained an attitude for the TV series. *The Boys* reunites the 42-year-old actor with Kripke, who was confident in Ackles's ability to go dark after watching his *Supernatural* character Dean Winchester do so on multiple occasions.

"Look, if I had my way, I would have put Jensen on every show between *Supernatural* and this, but he was a little busy shooting that," Kripke says. "We could never figure it out, and even then, it would have just been a cameo or a guest spot. This was a great opportunity,

“So often, power means fronting as this macho illusion that never existed”

because this was his first job after *Supernatural*. It came by completely randomly. I did not at all think of him for this part. I never thought to put two and two together. I was looking for older men because Soldier Boy is this grizzled John Wayne type. And we weren't really finding anyone that we loved.

"It was honestly Jensen calling me for a completely different reason in the middle of that," he continues. "I said, 'Wait a minute. Are you interested in doing this part?' He said, 'Send this to me.' He called me back the same →

MAN OUT OF TIME

Jensen Ackles talks Soldier Boy

After 15 seasons of *Supernatural*, what made Soldier Boy a role you could sink your teeth into?

Any opportunity to get to play in a world created, or shepherded by, Eric Kripke, is one that I will blindly sign up for. I love the experience that he gives the audience. I love the experience he gives his characters and his actors. When the opportunity came up, I hadn't even seen what the role was. I knew nothing about it. He said there was something and I said, "Tell me when to jump." That's what it really boiled down to.

How would you describe your take on the character?

He is the analogue version of Homelander. He was the original guy. There was no template for him. He created the template. You will probably see some of those similarities between Soldier Boy and Homelander, or even a multitude of the Seven. This was the trial-and-error guy. He did a lot of things great, and he did a lot of things greatly wrong. It's interesting being the new guy on set, but playing the character who has been there the longest.

The character should be Soldier Grandpa at this point. That gave me some real texture, some fun notes. It's that older generation mentality. It's an analogue guy trapped in a very high-tech digital world. He certainly doesn't belong. That doesn't make him happy. That generally makes people grumpy, curmudgeonly and angry.

Soldier Boy basically embodies toxic masculinity. What was it like exploring that social commentary?

I am in my forties, and I believe I might be one of the last generations that really witnessed that toxic masculinity without any repercussion. It's just what we were taught. You stand up, you dust it off and you be a man about it, not really knowing the implications that might have on a person. That's just how I was taught and how my dad was taught.

That came down from his father, who served in the Second World War. It was the generational mentality of, "That's who we are. Suck it up. Men don't cry." For me, born and raised in North Texas, that was very normal to me. I remember not getting just whipped or spanked when I did something wrong, but I would get paddled in school. I remember when that changed. I felt I got a good idea

of where to go with that type of character.

How do Soldier Boy and Homelander size each other up?

Homelander is the new iteration of Soldier Boy. He's the new kid on the block in Soldier Boy's eyes. Going back to that toxic masculinity: very true to form, one of the first things that ever comes out of Soldier Boy's mouth after he looks at a big poster of Homelander is "What the fuck?" It's just looking at the world around him, knowing he doesn't fit in and knowing things are different. And there it is, personified in this statuesque red, white and blue superhero. He's not thrilled about that. The relationship is immediately contentious. They have their words.

Soldier Boy starts out gruff, with this Grizzly Adams-type beard. How did you go about figuring out what his look would be?

It was pretty simple. Kripke just goes, "Don't shave and don't cut your hair until you get here." He told me that in the fall of 2020. I didn't get there until April 2021. I had a good five or six months just to let it go. That's not a new thing with a lot of actors. They just let the hair grow, let the facial hair grow as much as they can until they get their next job. Then, you can shape it into whatever you want that character to look like. If you can avoid wearing wigs and avoid wearing a fake moustache... that stuff is inhibiting.

What was your impression of the costume?

What I really liked about it was it wasn't your one-piece, tights and capes type of thing. It was almost a hybrid of a superhero/military style. It gave me some room to move so I wasn't just locked into a rubber suit. I was able to be physical in the outfit. That was certainly important for this season. Don't get me wrong: it was hot and it wasn't the most comfortable thing. But for what it was, it's a work of art. Being able to exist in that was pretty fun.





A-Train poses in front of a statue of Homelander.

Many questions to be asked and answered.



day and said, 'Oh my god. I would so love to do this'. He really stepped up. He auditioned for the studio and network. He really worked to get the part. It wasn't handed to him. He showed he was the right guy."

Asked to pinpoint a guilty pleasure – and the most entertaining character to write for – Kripke says it would be The Deep. The aquatic Supe, played by Chace Crawford, just can't catch a break. His sea creature pals keep getting massacred, his "gills" talk to him, and he's been expelled by the Seven. Despite his best efforts, it sounds as if The Deep will remain a punching bag for humiliation moving forward.

"As the 'fish guy,' those powers are so stupid that The Deep just goes through the most ridiculous shit," says Kripke. "Massive amounts of credit to Chace. He keeps being so laugh-out-

“Those powers are so stupid that The Deep just goes through the most ridiculous shit”

loud, dude-bro funny in every single thing he does that it just makes you want to write for him more and more. This is actually his craziest season yet, and he pulls it off."

Then there's Homelander. Stormfront may have stroked his ego, but others kicked him in the balls. Most notably, Starlight betrayed him. Maeve blackmailed Homelander. Butcher took custody of his son. As expected, Homelander isn't one to reflect or self-contemplate.

Instead, all his pent-up anger and frustration just makes him more dangerous than ever.

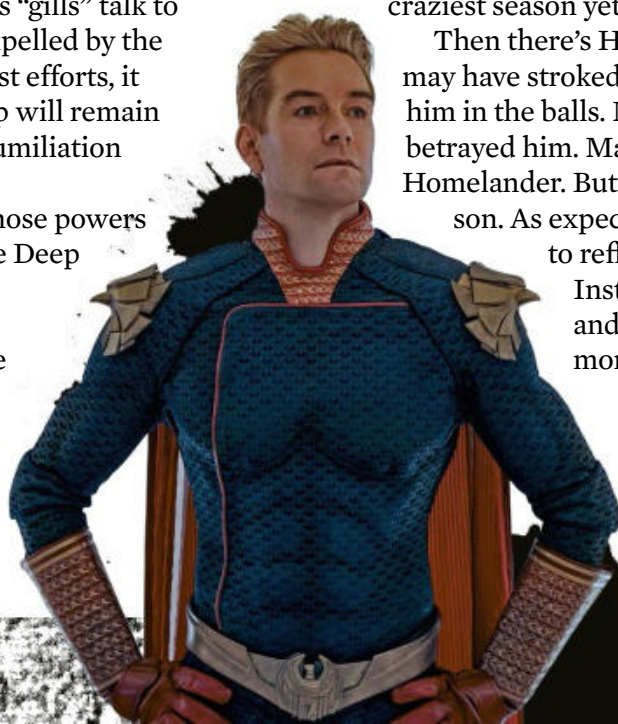
"Homelander feels victimised and petulant and aggrieved, as if

somehow the most powerful person on the planet is the biggest victim on the planet," Kripke offers. "And if that reminds you of certain American heads of state, that's purely not at all by coincidence. But he's heading towards a breaking point. Season three takes place a full year after season two."

A laser-eyed Butcher and his mortal enemy will come to blows. "They both kind of want it," teases Kripke. Fans want ringside tickets to the brawl, too. What's interesting is that at a time when Hughie is at his happiest, Starlight is flourishing and the Boys seem content, only Butcher and Homelander are still miserable.

"We really drew out this season more than we have in the past," Kripke concludes, "and shared some interesting similarities between those two characters, and how much all they want is to burn the world down to go after the other one." ●

The first three episodes of The Boys season three are on Prime Video on 3 June, with the remaining five following weekly.



OBI-WAN KENOBI

THE NEW JEDI

JEDI

DISNEY+'S NEW **OBI-WAN KENOBI** TV SHOW REVEALS WHAT THE VENERABLE JEDI HAS BEEN UP TO SINCE *REVENGE OF THE SITH*. WE GET THE LOWDOWN ON A HOTLY ANTICIPATED COMEBACK...

WORDS: **RICHARD EDWARDS**





Reva (Moses Ingram) scopes out the city.



Obi-Wan pretends he's not in when the bell rings.

ORIGINAL MOVIES or prequels? Which you prefer depends greatly on your own point of view – or at the very least, when you were born. Nonetheless, there's one character who straddles both eras of *Star Wars* storytelling like a bearded colossus, a Jedi Master who had front row seats while the limelight-hogging Skywalkers were busy either falling from grace or taking their first step into a larger world.

At risk of stretching a metaphor to the point where millions of voices cry out in terror, he's the energy field binding two trilogies together, and his new eponymously titled Disney+ show is set to fill in some crucial gaps of canon from those two decades between *Revenge Of The Sith* and *A New Hope*.

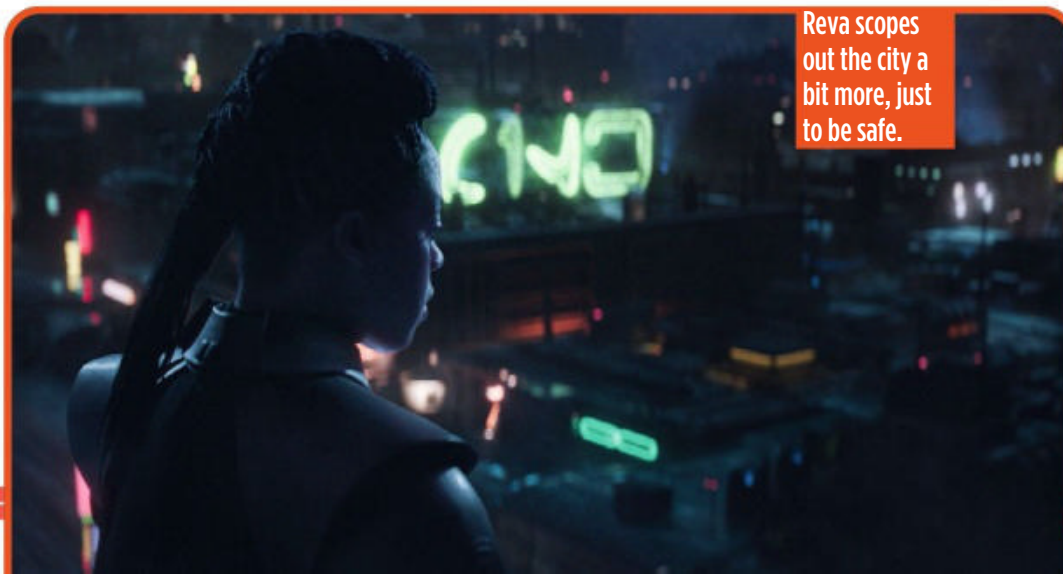
"We're 10 years after *Revenge Of The Sith* and it's quite a dark period," *Obi-Wan Kenobi* director and executive producer Deborah Chow tells *SFX*, with understatement. "Obviously, Order 66 has happened, so many

of the Jedi are either dead or in hiding, and the Empire is fully in ascendance. And for Obi-Wan personally, there's obviously all the feelings towards Anakin and what happened in *Revenge Of The Sith*, so there's a lot of stuff for him to deal with at the start of the show."

"Certainly one of the things that appealed to me is that the Obi-Wan we left at the end of *Episode III* is very different to the Sir Alec Guinness interpretation of the character," adds writer and executive producer Joby Harold. "At the end of *Episode III*, Obi-Wan is quite emotionally torn up in regards to what's

happened with him and Anakin, and then in *Episode IV* he's comparatively at peace. That always felt like an untold story to me. How he became that zen Jedi master having seen his brother burn in front of him on Mustafar, there's a clear arc to a story between those two moments. It's very much the connective tissue between the prequels and the original trilogy."

The human form of that metaphorical glue is prequels star Ewan McGregor, who reprises the role he inherited from original Obi-Wan, Alec Guinness. It's taken a fair amount of time for the stars (presumably the twin suns of



Reva scopes out the city a bit more, just to be safe.

OBI-EWAN KENOBI

The Force is still strong with Ewan McGregor

Where do we find Obi-Wan Kenobi when the story begins?

► The Jedi Order are decimated, everyone's gone into hiding, and nobody can risk contacting one another. Obi-Wan lost his brother and his best friend to the Dark Side and I think feels entirely responsible for that. He's lost and I thought that that was the most exciting thing when I started speaking to Disney about this years and years ago. We're telling a story about somebody who's lost their faith – and if they do get it back, how will they get it back?

You're a producer on the show, as well as being the star. What's it been like to be so heavily involved in the development process?

► The amazing thing about *Star Wars* now is that the universe has sort of grown. When I made the first three films, we only had three other movies to sort of tell us what the world is. Now there's TV shows, movies, computer games, comics, cartoons, novels, graphic novels...

there's no end of storytelling going on in *Star Wars*. And it all has to coordinate with each other, so we can't have a character in our story that doesn't exist in that timeline in the videogame. That was part of our process in finding the story to tell, and I think that we found one that will very much satisfy the fans.

How did ILM's state of the art virtual backdrops on *Obi-Wan Kenobi* compare to the green- and bluescreens you used for the prequels?

► We made a lot of our film on a StageCraft set, which is like a huge VR screen. So if we were [shooting scenes] in the desert, even though we're on a stage, we're surrounded by desert. And as you move the camera, the perspective on the



screen will change, so it's like shooting for real. It's incredible technology and that was a real gamechanger for us as actors.

You were a bit of a demon with a lightsaber in the prequels. Did the old skills come back quickly?

► I worked with Jo Jo [Jonathan Eusebio] who was our fight arranger on *Birds Of Prey*, and he's amazing. He did a great job of studying what we'd done in those original films, and evolved my techniques, bearing in mind the story – while taking them in a direction that made sense for somebody who was now 20 years older. It was fun to do again. I got super-fit before we started the fight rehearsals, because I remembered what it was like. It's like doing a boxing match – when they shout cut you have to sit

down, somebody wipes all the sweat off your brow and then you go straight back in to do take two.

How did putting Obi-Wan's Jedi robes back on compare to returning as Renton in the *Trainspotting* sequel?

► My first day at work on *T2*, I walked into the bar, there was Jonny Lee Miller playing Sick Boy, and I just felt like Renton again. It was no effort, it was like he'd been living in my head for 20 years, and just needed to be let out. So I feel like once you've really played and studied a role, it must just be in your head somewhere. [Coming back to Obi-Wan] I felt like mostly it was fine except I didn't have his voice yet. I really had to go back to Alec Guinness, so I watched all of the *Star Wars* films, some of *The Clone Wars*, and I started watching a lot of Alec Guinness on YouTube. I needed to get his voice back in my head. I don't do an impersonation of Alec, but I have to feel like he is who I become.

GETTY



The Grand Inquisitor (Rupert Friend).

Tatooine) to align enough for him to step into those Jedi fatigues once again, however. As far back as 2017 – a long time ago, when movies were still the priority in that galaxy far, far away – Lucasfilm recruited *Billy Elliot* director Stephen Daldry to develop an Obi-Wan Kenobi movie. But in the wake of *Solo: A Star Wars Story*'s lacklustre box office performance, attention instead turned to Disney's new streaming service.

"We certainly inherited a lot of ideas from the [story] development in the past," admits Harold, "but there's also a lot of new directions and ideas we explored, building off some of those things that we inherited."

"It feels lovely that it's now this limited series, because it gives you enough room to really build the character out; you can actually now spend time with Obi-Wan in his normal world before some of the things you saw in the teaser transpire."

While a big part of Kenobi's long and lonely mission is watching out for the young Luke Skywalker – like McGregor, Joel Edgerton and Bonnie Piesse are back from the prequels as the kid's guardians, Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru – said teaser makes it clear that some of his adventures will take him away from the coarse, irritating sands of Tatooine. In other words, there'll be more to *Obi-Wan Kenobi* than watching a 50-something guy hanging out in ➔



DARTH BECOMES HIM

Sith happens once again for Hayden Christensen

We've not seen Darth Vader at this point in the *Star Wars* timeline. What's his state of mind?

► Darth Vader is very focused on finding Obi-Wan Kenobi. He feels like there's some unsettled business, but he's very much driven by his anger. He's still reeling from the loss of Padmé, trying to process that and his relationship with the Jedi Order, and certainly with Obi-Wan. He is fully Darth Vader, but there will always be a little bit of Anakin in there, too.

What was it like stepping back into the Vader suit?

► Putting the costume back on after all this time had a sort of nostalgic quality to it. I was initially transported back to *Episode III*, and getting to put it back on now at this point in my life was just a very surreal experience. Every time I put it on, I felt very lucky to get to do so.

You've spent a lot of the time since *Episode III* working on your farm. Has the experience changed you as an actor?

► A lot of time has passed since *Episode III* was finished, and my life has taken me in many different directions. I bought some property out in the country years ago, and became quite enamoured with that whole lifestyle. A lot has changed in my life that informs my approach to my work. I think that what was really interesting about this opportunity was getting to play this character again at this point in my life, and how this sort of passage of time might affect that approach. It's a very unique thing, and one that I never thought I would be doing.

a hut, doing whatever it is 50-something guys hanging out in huts do.

"I think we can relate to wanting to get out of the house because of the last couple of years!" Harold laughs. "That probably informed the writing, actually, but part of the fun of it is seeing him in his house and getting a sense of what that routine looked like. We all imagine what he was doing for that period of time, and getting to understand that rhythm is certainly part of the fascination of the character. But the other part was to see if we could take the show into places no one is anticipating."

DUEL OF THE MATES

One thing most of the known universe is anticipating, however, is the rematch of the century, because it's no secret that at some point in the show's six-episode run, Obi-Wan will be facing off against the former apprentice he left as a dismembered, burning husk on the volcanic sands of Mustafar. Hayden Christensen – who's now just as likely to be found working on his Canadian farm as appearing on screen – is even back as Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader to resume hostilities with his old Master.

"There were definitely big conversations about [whether we should bring back Vader] because it's not something you do lightly," says Chow. "But from a story point of view, we started by looking at Obi-Wan and going, 'What's important to him in his life? Who are the people that have had the most profound effect on him?' And obviously, coming out of *Revenge Of The Sith*, Anakin and Vader have played a humongous role in his life, and they continue to do so in *A New Hope*. That was the origin of it, just trying to tell a story that felt genuine to Obi-Wan as a person."



Indira Varma as an Imperial captain: boo, hiss!

But Vader won't be the only villain on Kenobi's tail. Aside from the usual assortment of Imperial officers and Stormtroopers (the sort of bad guys a Jedi can eliminate without breaking a sweat), the Empire has dispatched numerous Inquisitors to help Vader hunt down the remaining survivors of Order 66. These Dark Side Force-wielders (many of them

"One thing I've learned is that *Star Wars* belongs to everyone"



Luke's uncle Owen. Spoiler: he dies. Eventually.



Obi visits the farmers' market of a Saturday.

former Jedi who jumped ship when they realised which way the wind was blowing) were first introduced in animated series *Star Wars Rebels*, set four or five years after the events of *Obi-Wan Kenobi*.

On screen, their ranks will be represented by new character Reva/Third Sister (played by *The Queen's Gambit*'s Moses Ingram), and live-action versions of *Rebels* main antagonists the Grand Inquisitor (*Homeland*'s Rupert Friend) and Fifth Brother (*Fast & Furious*'s Sung Kang).

"If you're telling the story of Jedi on the run, then you need the agents of that hunt," says Harold. "The Inquisitors felt like a very interesting thing to introduce into live action, but also germane to the Obi-Wan story we were telling. They're a part of the experience of what it's like to be a Jedi being hunted, and that's the story of Obi-Wan. Is Obi-Wan one of their main targets? Well, if you're an Inquisitor and you're hunting Jedi, you're looking for the top dogs, so certainly Obi-Wan would be one of those considering the legacy of the character."

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

Now, as the live-action Obi-Wan gets set to dust off his lightsaber for the first time in 17 years, one big question remains: will it be Team Prequel or Team Original Trilogy that's most satisfied by the results? Or could the new TV

show bring balance to the fanbase in a way Anakin was once prophesised to bring balance to the Force?

"There's multiple generations of *Star Wars* fans now," says Chow. "There's obviously the connection for us to the original trilogy, but you've got kids now that grew up with Rey, and then there's the generation that grew up with the prequels, so those are their characters in a big way. We didn't specifically try to aim for any one of those demographics – we really just tried to focus on Obi-Wan's story and what felt genuine to him."

"If there's one thing I've learned through this entire process it's that *Star Wars* belongs to everyone," adds Harold. "I'm of an age where the original trilogy was my entry point into this world, but if you try to adhere to any particular trilogy as yours, I think you're in trouble because it's taken on a different meaning since the prequels came out."

"It's been really interesting to see how the fans' reaction to the prequels has developed over the years. As the entire scope of the bigger canon is truly embraced, it becomes something much bigger. I'm excited that the show can mean as much to my kids, as it will to my parents and as it will, hopefully, to the original trilogy generation." ●

Obi-Wan Kenobi is on Disney+ from 27 May.



REVA LA VIDA

Moses Ingram is off hunting Jedi as new Inquisitor Reva

Star Wars has some memorable villains. How do you deal with the expectations of creating a new one?

► I didn't think much about any of the other ones, partially because when I started, I didn't know so much about *Star Wars*. So I had a really great opportunity in probably making something that didn't have to live up to anything else. It can be new in a way that's a lot more forgiving than Obi-Wan for Ewan – as much as Ewan has full rein over the character, I'm sure if he wanted to try something super-new or different, people will be like, "That's not Obi!"

We know that Reva is one of the Inquisitors hunting down Jedi for the Empire, but not much else. What are her motivations in the show?

► Her mission is to win and she is on the same team as Darth Vader. She's led by what she believes to be true, and she doesn't need anybody else to agree with her. She's going to do whatever she has to do, by any means necessary.

What was it like the first time you picked up a lightsaber?

► There's so many muscles in my hand that I didn't even know existed until I went to twirl a lightsaber! There were many days where my hands would just spasm while I'm trying to hold it, but once I started to get the hang of it, it was super-rewarding. One particular twirl was so hard to get, but when you finally get it after working on something for months, it just feels really, really good.

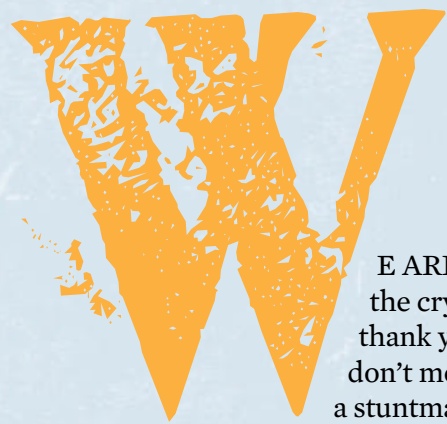




THE KIDS ARE UNITED

BRITISH SF GREAT JOHN WYNDHAM'S CLASSIC NOVEL **THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS** HAS BEEN ADAPTED FOR TELEVISION. WRITER DAVID FARR TELLS US HOW HE WENT ABOUT IT

WORDS: IAN BERRIMAN



WE ARE ROLLING!" COMES the cry. "SFX are hot!" Why, thank you. Ah... apparently they don't mean us, but the squibs on a stuntman's chest, ready to be activated by an effects person.

A group of neatly lined-up squaddies present arms, cock their weapons, and aim at their superior officer – who stands stock-still, showing no signs of alarm. Then they all fire simultaneously. The squibs crack, perfectly timed, and he drops to the ground like a puppet that's had its strings cut.

It's 18 October 2021, and we're looking out from Shelter 9 at RAF Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire. It's a vast complex, one you could spend half an hour driving around – and on arrival, it looked like our bewildered cabbie might... In the '50s and '60s, this hangar was home to US bombers; a mural nearby celebrates the Fightin' Fifty-Fifth. Today, it's playing host to filming for a new TV version of John Wyndham's classic 1958 novel *The Midwich Cuckoos*.

Half an hour ago, we sat in a catering bus, observing with wry amusement as a crowd of red-eyed military extras winced and cursed as they struggled to insert jet-black contact lenses. An hour before that, we caught a brief scene featuring Keeley Hawes and Max Beesley sitting in their Land Rover, having recently arrived at the fictional Winthorpe Military Base.

Hawes's character expressed concern about tests being carried out on two children: "What are they doing in there? Why aren't we allowed in?" Then they both mysteriously slumped forward, unconscious. Piece all this together and you'll understand that it's not the *children's* welfare she should have been worried about...

PREGNANT PAUSE

As anyone familiar with the book will have twigged, this seven-part adaptation builds upon Wyndham's original story. That centres on a rural village which experiences an inexplicable event: one day, everyone in a two-mile radius collapses unconscious. For 24 hours, no one's able to enter the area without suffering the same fate.

Then, as suddenly as it began, the phenomenon ends. But it's soon discovered that every woman of child-bearing age in Midwich is pregnant. And when they give birth, it's to rapidly developing, uncannily identical children with gold eyes and blond hair, able to telepathically share knowledge and force others to do their bidding – even to commit suicide.



Susannah Zellaby (Keeley Hawes).

The man tasked with contemporising the story was David Farr, perhaps best known for adapting John le Carré's *The Night Manager*. He's been an admirer of the book since age 11, when he read it off the back of watching the BBC's 1981 take on another Wyndham classic, *The Day Of The Triffids*.

"It scared me and affected me even more than *Triffids*," Farr tells *SFX*. "I then went through all the other Wyndhams, but *The Midwich Cuckoos* remained my favourite. I thought it was such a terrifying idea. And it really spoke to me, as someone living in a very average Surrey town in the '80s."

What particularly strikes him about the novel is how thoughtful it is, with Wyndham using his uncanny scenario to explore ethical questions. "He's almost a philosopher or an anthropologist masquerading as a novelist, in some ways," Farr argues. "Those big ideas around one species fighting another, or

Darwinian ideas of survival, and the politics that connects to that – that's what makes him unusual."

Such an intellectual underpinning is still present, with Farr tapping into contemporary concerns about the future of the planet. "What's going on right now in the debates around global warming is: 'Have we as a species run our race? Would we be better off being replaced by some superior form?' These



Aisling Loftus as Zoe Moran: "Not sure *this* is right."



Ah, look at the little cherubs. Ah. AAAAARGH.

are massive Wyndham arguments that are really relevant. So that foundation remains 100% there, and is so inspiring.”

This modern-day update differs in other ways too. Midwich is now an affluent commuter town: “Those Sunday Times articles that tell you where to bring your kids up – it’d definitely be on the list”, says Farr. It’s also “a domestic show, very much about families, about relationships”, more focused on the emotional impact of the “Dayout” and its aftermath on the few hundred residents that were incapacitated.

“What makes the book interesting to adapt is that Wyndham’s not as interested in the things that a dramatist has to be interested in,” Farr explains. “He’s not as interested in character, particularly. He’s not so interested in, ‘What would it psychologically be like to give birth to something, then begin to believe that it’s out to usurp you?’ He does tiptoe into that terrain, but in a quite distanced, quite male, quite ironic way. Where we’ve enriched the piece, I hope, is through the characterisation – particularly of the mothers.”

It’s a fair assessment. In Wyndham’s novel, the figure foregrounded is a man in his sixties: Gordon Zellaby, who pens books on philosophical subjects. What little we get to know about the mothers is reported by him or the narrator. Here, the character’s been gender-swapped to Susannah Zellaby (Hawes), a local family therapist enlisted to provide support to the women affected. →



FORCE PERSPECTIVE

Max Beesley is Midwich copper Paul Kirby

Can you describe your character?

» He’s a pretty hands-on DCI of Midwich, and runs the town, really. He’s fundamentally a very dogmatic policeman, by the book in a lot of ways. He’s had a military past, very brief – I think we might see his REME [Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers] tattoo once in the whole show. But that becomes quite important in the seventh episode. And if the show gets recommissioned it’ll probably be quite important for the second season as well.

How does he relate to Susannah?

» Susannah’s got that sort of personal touch with the community, and mine’s more professional. He doesn’t trust her at first, but as the drama unfolds he sees she’s actually been right about nearly everything all along. Then they join forces before the end, and work together as a unit.

What sort of approach does this series take to the story?

» I think what’s brilliant about the show is you’re not tuning into a very obvious, from frame one, sci-fi drama. It looks like a very normal, but dramatic, piece of television. Then when ridiculous things start happening, it makes it very scary, because you’re not cranking music up,

or effects. There’s no gimmickry with the children, it’s just performance – and there are a few children on this that are absolutely amazing actors. It’s quite layered as a drama, and that will pull you in straight away, because the central performances are very strong. So when the abnormal occurs, you go, “What the fuck are we watching?”. I think it’s pretty scary.

What do you think it is about the basic concept that’s so compelling?

» Ultimately, it shows quite vividly parental attachment to their offspring, and how engrossed they become by their children, but then how, “Bang!”, it’s gone – the kids are just vessels, and there’s no attachment. That made me think about my kids, and my role as a father. We all like looking at our kids and saying, “Doesn’t he look like you?”, and we get affirmation from children having some of our nuances. Ultimately, we’re feeding our own egos, really.

But I think the best thing to do is make the children think like they’ve been lent to us, and accept them, and try and make them better versions of who *they* are. Because ultimately, we’ll be off the Earth and they’ll be thriving. So this shows you that separation process, but through the sci-fi element.



» David Farr's decision that his Cuckoos – played, at different stages, by both six-year-olds and 10-year-olds – wouldn't look identical posed a challenge: how to visually convey that they're a single consciousness?

"We had to do it by other means: by costume, hair and make-up," explains producer Robert Cheek, "and by a lot of movement workshops with the children. A child who doesn't fidget or have lots of running-around-energy, but moves quite

deliberately, and together with others... that's really uncanny. They're very coordinated when they walk. There's no mistaking that they're a single group.

"Loulou Bontemps, our costume designer, is an absolute genius," he adds. "The costumes for the children are a bit vintage-y, so they evoke the old film in a way, and the roots of the book. And they're heightened, so they're a bit unusual. The children go to the same school, so they like wearing their blazers."

In choosing the colour palette for the Midwich

Prep School uniforms, Bontemps drew on the colours of real cuckoos: the greys of their plumage, the blues of some cuckoo eggs, and the yellow of the birds' feet (hence the uniform's yellow socks).

Her costume concept notes also stress that when in uniform, the children should "All dress immaculately – top buttons done up, socks pulled up."

"There's something strange about them," Cheek concludes, "But it doesn't jump you out of the drama – and that's exactly where we wanted to be."



"Almost where I started was to think about, 'Who is Zellaby in our world?'," says Farr, "because I didn't feel it would be that character in quite the same way. But I did love the idea that there'd be a character who was a kind of priest – or as it's turned out, priestess – to the community, someone who feels a kind of pastoral responsibility to that community."

WIG OUT

Another important character is Paul Kirby (Beesley), a stoical Midwich policeman. "If she's the priestess of the town, then in terms of Western movies he's the Sheriff," Farr says.

"He's the local copper who happens to be there the night it all begins. A terrible personal thing happens to him that night, which means that not only professionally but emotionally he is engaged and connected with what then happens with these children. He's co-opted by the government to be that nexus between the families, the government and the intelligence services."

While Farr is the head writer, credited on the four episodes which book-end the series, parts three, four and five are credited to female writers: Sasha Hails, Namsi Khan and Laura Lomas. And two of the three directors are

“Every mother's had that momentary experience of having a weird alienation from their child”

women: Jennifer Perrott and Alice Troughton. This is all by design. "I was very aware that it's a female-dominated piece," says Farr. "The men are excluded from the event, because they're not the fathers, whereas the mothers have to deal with the most fundamental terror: not believing your child might actually be yours. Every mother's had that momentary experience of suddenly having a weird alienation from their child. And obviously, postnatal depression is a massive extension of that, where suddenly you don't feel the things you should feel towards your child. It felt really necessary to bring female voices – and female eyes – to those stories."

The series also diverges from previous adaptations when it comes to how the children are depicted. Firstly, there's the way they look. In the novel, they're almost impossible to tell



apart – even some of the mothers struggle to do so. Eerily identical kids provided big-screen versions with an iconic visual. In what's arguably a risky move, that's not the case here, with Farr reasoning that it makes no sense for the Cuckoos' unearthly nature to be "blindingly obvious".

"We have no blonde wigs!" he laughs. "I felt there's something interesting about the idea that in the past, the children came and looked identical, and that was a flaw. What they've learned is that to look identical is not a sensible evolutionary idea. If you're thinking about the cuckoo, which is the foundational idea: cookies camouflage their egg shells in order to go into other birds' nests. We took that idea of camouflage very seriously. So it was really important for us to camouflage our children better than the films did. That allows a secret to be maintained more easily than if you're dealing with something more overtly alien."

Another key difference is that while interconnected, able to learn in a way Farr





compares to artificial intelligence, these Cuckoos have more individuality, having been raised separately. “This is the bit which I don’t think Wyndham does as much on, and we’ve pushed much further. They’ve received different levels of love. Even if you’re a hive mind, that differentiation individuates you. So there’s a tension in the children between nature and nurture. Your nature is to be predestined to the hive mind; you have a very clear intention as a species. But individually you’re receiving different experiences.”

He cites chapter 20 of the novel, in which Zellaby notes how the children still enjoy childish pleasures like sucking on a bullseye. “That’s the clue: they enjoy different flavours of sweet. Zellaby’s fascinated by that, because it shows individual character. That idea of taste is something I’ve used, quite literally.”

Going back to what Farr said about global warming, it also sounds like there might be a little Greta Thunberg in the mix... “Right now, we have a bunch of kids who are really anxious

about humanity’s fate,” Farr says.

“Understandably, given what they’ve been told about the environment, they’re very sceptical about our ability to deal with it; our ability to cooperate. When you have a putative new species that completely collaborates with itself, because it’s one mind, there’s an argument for saying that they’re simply a better version of us. That’s something we explore.”

Could that exploration outlast the seven episodes in the can? Potentially, according to Farr. “There’s a bigger narrative within which our narrative takes place,” he teases. “That allows us to potentially go further if we want to, and – if the season is successful – to expand beyond that.”

Executive producers Marc Samuelson and Robert Cheek also have the rights to make TV versions of other Wyndham properties. Would Farr fancy a crack at any of those? “The other book that Rob’s passionate about, and I’d have an interest in, would be *The Chrysalids*,” he confesses, “Because I think it’s pretty special. I know they have a strong intention to do more. But, y’know, it takes a long, long time, so definitely don’t hold your breath!”

Fingers crossed, *Midwich* will do well enough to demonstrate a public appetite for more Wyndham. Although maybe Farr could just get his Cuckoos to pay Sky’s Director of Commissioning, Drama a visit... ●

The Midwich Cuckoos comes to Sky Max, with all episodes streaming on NOW, from 2 June.



Susannah’s getting a bit suspicious about it all.

MIDWICH MOVIES

Big-screen takes on the Cuckoos



VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED (1960)

Shot by director Wolf Rilla in a “low-key documentary manner”, the first film is fairly faithful. Tweaks included making one of the Cuckoos (whose wigs were designed to give their heads a domed look) the son of Zellaby (George Sanders). Martin Stephens (David) overdubbed his lines to add an uncanny note. Another memorable addition is the image of a brick wall, which Zellaby visualises to hide his thoughts as he blows up the children.



CHILDREN OF THE DAMNED (1964)

This gritty, noirish sequel has a vein of religious symbolism. A UNESCO project brings ethnically diverse prodigies from around the world to London. State forces attempt to seize these “assets”, but the kids hole up in a derelict church, fending off attacks with a sonic weapon. Blood tests suggest they are humanity advanced a million years. In the gut-punch finale, a rolling screwdriver causes a signal to destroy the church to be sent by accident.



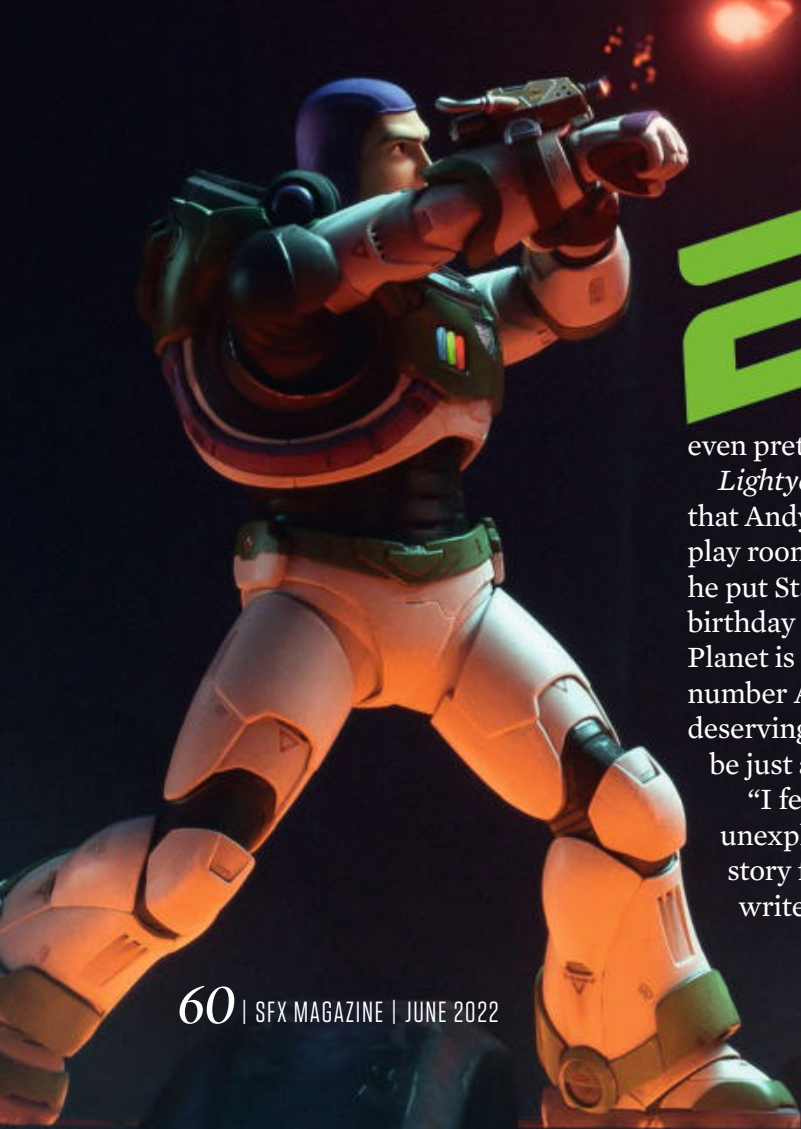
VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED (1995)

In John Carpenter’s “contractual assignment” remake, *Midwich* is a US coastal town, and the Cuckoos have a CGI glare and platinum blond wigs. Carpenter ups the ante with big explosions, charred corpses, and a cops-on-troops slaughter. There are two main innovations: here, the Cuckoos are unequivocally alien (a still-born baby looks like an X-File); and one is capable of empathy – even tears. But overall it’s a pretty pointless exercise.

ABOUT A TOY

PIXAR LOOKS TO THE STARS IN **LIGHTYEAR**, A SCI-FI ADVENTURE
THAT BOLDLY GOES WHERE NO TOY STORY HAS GONE BEFORE...

WORDS: RICHARD EDWARDS



BUZZ LIGHTYEAR MAY HAVE become a superstar but he was also an action figure, a child's plaything, a T-O-Y – and not even a flying one at that. It turns out, however, that even pretend Space Rangers come from somewhere...

Lightyear, Pixar's 26th movie, imagines the film that Andy – pre-teen owner of *Toy Story*'s famous play room – would have watched back in 1995 when he put Star Command's finest at the top of his birthday wishlist. In the fictional world where Pizza Planet is a popular fast-food destination and the number A113 crops up with the spooky regularity deserving of an *X-Files* case, the *Lightyear* film may be just as pivotal as *Star Wars*.

"I felt like there was a story that was unexplored, that could be a separate, divergent story from the *Toy Story* universe," *Lightyear* writer/director Angus MacLane says of the

studio's upcoming space opera. "For me it was an opportunity to take a character that I felt familiar with [MacLane was animating Buzz as far back as 1999's *Toy Story 2*], and then explore his universe. Also, when you're dealing with sci-fi, there's so much to set up that you're looking for anything that's relatable, just to build around. Buzz provided that stepping-off point."

While this Buzz dresses in standard issue Star Command spacesuits, recites some familiar catchphrases and is prone to recording mission logs in real-time, this is definitely *not* the deluded Mr Light Beer who became the comedic foil for an insecure toy cowboy. Instead, this Buzz is the blueprint, a movie Space Ranger whose colossal big-screen success has spawned a merchandising empire so large it occupied an entire aisle of Al's Toy Barn in *Toy Story 2*.

Turning an action figure into a human (albeit one built of pixels rather than flesh and blood) required some unconventional reverse engineering on the part of Pixar's team of animation geniuses. MacLane says he imagined that this live-action *Lightyear* movie was followed by a spin-off cartoon that subsequently inspired the action figure we saw in *Toy Story*. And as with the blond bequipped Egon Spengler in *The Real Ghostbusters*, that meant a fair bit of artistic licence could play into the development of Buzz 2.0. →





Aww, look at Buzz, so young and hopeful. Bless.



“When you’re doing a toy of something, you kind of boil it down to its essential essence,” MacLane explains. “So extrapolating from that, we needed to have a character that was a little more well-rounded. The Buzz Lightyear character, out of the box, is pretty one-dimensional – or I guess two-dimensional because if it’s one-dimensional, you’d just be a single point! – which is great for a sidekick, but would be really irritating for 90 minutes. We needed to find a way to get the spirit of a dutiful Space Ranger who was committed to the job, and had a kind of square personality, and then work out how that would feed into a larger feature narrative and arc.”

“We also knew that visually we had to design a character that would wear the ultimate Buzz suit in the end,” adds producer Galyn Susman. “There were things that we knew he was going to have – like the big chin and the dimple – but it was kind of fun going, ‘What do you think Buzz’s hair is?’ That was uncharted territory.”

Beyond Buzz’s appearance, there was another integral part of the character that MacLane and his crew had to nail. After all, Buzz’s journey from confused Space Ranger wannabe to valued member of Andy’s toy room collective wouldn’t have been the same without Tim Allen’s iconic voice performance. But where do you find someone with the qualities to play the original Buzz? Enter a man who’s turned playing lantern-jawed action heroes into an artform – former Captain America Chris Evans.

“When we first talked about [the role], Chris was really reverent to the original performance,” recalls MacLane, “and right away, I’m like, ‘I don’t want you to try to emulate that. That’s not what we’re interested in.’ We will have these lines of dialogue we feel like are obligatory – you know, ‘To infinity and beyond’ and all that stuff – just to feel respectful to the character. But at the same time, we

wanted Chris to bring his natural voice and add a little bit more body to it. It was about allowing him to find his take on the character, because that was appropriate for the film.”

HIP TO BE SQUARE

Lightyear may contain the gags and clever movie references that are standard issue for Pixar, but it is not a spoof on movie space opera. Instead, it follows in the caterpillar tracks of *Wall-E* to tell a sci-fi story built on very big ideas.

The “real” Buzz is a hero with derring-do to spare, yet he’s also flawed, an “act first, ask questions later” kind of guy who makes mistakes while trying to do the right thing. In the movie’s opening scenes, an error of judgement leaves the 1,200-strong crew of his Star Command vessel – affectionately known as the Turnip – marooned on a hostile world populated by hungry, prehensile vines and vicious bugs.

And despite the mind-bendingly meta nature of its origins, that “movie based on a movie about a toy inspired by a cartoon based on a movie” premise may not be the biggest head-scratcher about the story. Because while Emperor Zurg – Buzz’s in-canon nemesis from the *Toy Story* movies – will make an appearance as an evil, planet-conquering robot, the movie’s first-act antagonist comes from the more esoteric regions of hard SF.

As in Christopher Nolan’s *Interstellar*, *Lightyear* pits its hero against the perils of time dilation, as Buzz’s repeated hyperdrive test flights send him four years forward in time – again and again and again. But the movie never gets bogged down in the complexities of Einstein’s theory of general relativity, opting instead for a montage as

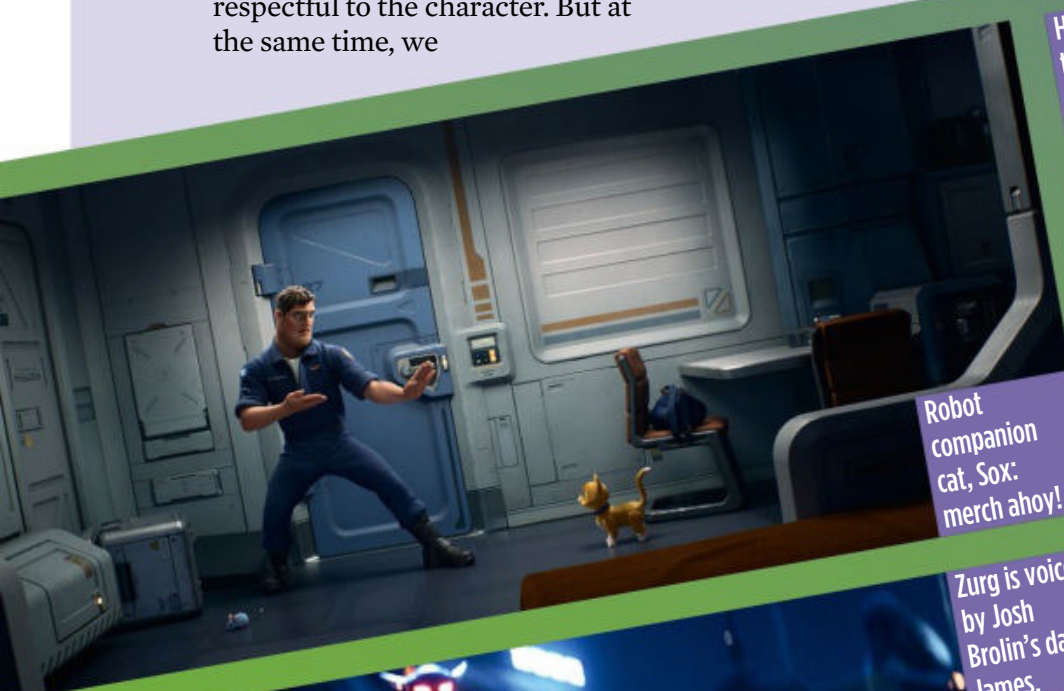
emotional as the opening of *Up*, in which Buzz helplessly looks on as everyone he knows ages around him.

“For Angus, it’s always been about telling a story that’s relatable,” says Susman, a physics major in her college days. “It’s sci-fi with a small ‘s’ and a capital ‘F’, so we will allow that story to drive the science – we just try to make sure that the science aspect of it isn’t broken to the point where the science geeks go, ‘Forget that!’. We were massaging the science into the place that that helps us tell our narrative.”

“The montage was trying to get an emotional hook for the character so you can align the audience with the character,” chips in MacLane. “And less talking is always good. We’re always trying to find ways to have less talking [in our storytelling].”

The design aesthetic of *Lightyear* is just as out of time as its hero. Indeed, there’s a certain irony to the fact that a movie released in 2022, created entirely in a computer, has aspired to make its spaceships, robots and other tech look like it’s been built as physical models and photographed by a movie camera – the sort of designs the effects pioneers of the ’70s and ’80s might have created for *Battlestar Galactica*, *Aliens* or the original *Star Wars*.

Lightyear exists in an analogue alternative future, where there’s not a touchscreen in sight, and cockpits are packed with satisfyingly chunky knobs, switches and dials. “We really wanted that real-world component, because a big inspiration is classic sci-fi from our youth and the toys we played with,” says sets art director Greg Peltz. “A lot of that was about deconstructing what it is that



Hang on, is that a younger Carl from *Up*? (No.)

Robot companion cat, Sox: merch ahoy!

Zurg is voiced by Josh Brolin’s dad, James.



Buzz teams up with the Junior Zap Patrol.

makes things feel too cold or distant in the computer. How we can learn from stuff in the real world so that our film feels like a real place, where you can actually believe these characters are living in this space and interacting with things.

"We wanted our world to have that very tactile feeling where you would want to interact with it," he adds. "There's something fun about pressing a big, chunky button."

The importance of big buttons was one of the key conclusions from the team's away missions to the Johnson Space Center in Houston, where they researched what makes NASA – and real-life astronauts – tick. "[We were struck by] the amount of stuff, like the switches and the dials and the buttons that a pilot has to work with," recalls Susman. "[NASA astronaut] Tom Marshburn explained that the dials that are very large are the ones to do with life support, and then everything gets smaller in descending order. I find that kind of thing fascinating. But also the spirit of the people at NASA was very edifying. There has to be a certain amount of humbleness to be an astronaut, because you rely on a huge team of people. That modesty was really inspiring."

If you're going to take a trip beyond the final frontier, you may as well learn from the best. 🌌

Lightyear is in cinemas from 17 June.

SHIP SHAPE

What made the spacecraft of '70s/'80s sci-fi so iconic?

ANGUS MACLANE (DIRECTOR): I feel like post-1960s, the studios were declining in profits and they didn't really know what to do – then George Lucas, Steven Spielberg and the USC [University of Southern California] generation came in. *Jaws*, *Close Encounters* and *Star Wars* made a lot of money, and once *Star Wars* came out, everyone at the other studios wanted to get on the sci-fi bandwagon – to varying success! But it also ushered in an era of talented young filmmakers with some weird concepts. I think there was this moment where there were still large budgets and large ideas. Also, effects were starting to be a little bit more interesting post-2001: *A Space Odyssey*.



GREG PELTZ (SETS ART DIRECTOR):

I feel like a part of it is that this was an era before computers, so everything had to be built – there is a certain aspect of grit and reality that just comes with that territory. And I think in the '70s and '80s in general – not even just related to sci-fi specifically, but just the era itself – there's a lot of cool industrial design. A big inspiration for me was real world aerospace design. You had the SR 71 Blackbird, which is, like, the coolest plane ever built, the Russian MiGs, or the NASA-X planes, right? They're all these really crazy outlandish styles that already look like a spaceship. On *Lightyear* we probably drew as much from the real-world stuff as we did from sci-fi.



Nothing bad better happen to the robo-kitty.



Alisha Hawthorne (Uzo Aduba): Buzz's old pal.



She's not too fussed about being stranded.



JM MIRO

Why the award-winning Canadian writer has turned to fantasy

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Centric Photography

HOW DO YOU PICK BETWEEN IDEAS, DECIDE which project is worth investing time in? JM Miro (aka Steven Price) can remember precisely how his Talents Series made its way to the top of the to-do list. He'd just arrived home and his wife, *Washington Black* novelist Esi Edugyan, was in the kitchen. "I said, 'What about this for a book? Children with superpowers in Victorian London.' She stopped what she was doing, looked at me and said, 'There, you have to write *that one*.'"

Be grateful for Edugyan's enthusiasm, because the first book in the trilogy, *Ordinary Monsters*, is fabulous. Here is a dark, twisting and compelling fantasy that combines a central idea in the *X-Men* comics, the ostracisation of youngsters who have eldritch abilities, with a fog-shrouded eeriness recalling the work of Charles Dickens. Yet these "Talents", gathered together at the Cairndale Institute outside Edinburgh, may be the world's best, even only hope.

DIFFERENT STROKES

At first glance, it seems an unusual project for a writer who, using his real name, had hitherto written poetry and well-regarded literary novels. So why fantasy? "Like everyone, I began as a reader, and as a little boy I found my solace, and my passion and love of reading, in fantasy books," Miro says. "I was a child of the '80s, and I was very lonely and isolated. And I devoured Robert Jordan, Terry Brooks, Tad Williams, Tolkien of course, Ursula Le Guin, Mercedes Lackey, Anne McCaffrey – the kind of books that you could find in mall bookstores."

Miro came back to fantasy in his twenties. As a poet, it offered "a kind of refuge, this safe space where I could just read for pleasure, could turn off that writer part of my brain". Later, reading to his children at bedtime ("and children's literature is almost overwhelmingly imaginative literature", he observes), he found himself dreaming up fantastic situations.

Having a pseudonym, essentially putting a name to this novelist writing for his younger self, was also important. "Something opened up for me," he says. "It was like there was this permission that was granted."

If all this largely explains the fantasy elements of *Ordinary Monsters*, its Victorian setting is at least partly rooted in Miro's interest in "tall tales" about how a paternal great-grandfather found his way to Canada from London. Added to this, he notes, the Victorian era is the first where we have "overwhelming documentation" that allows us to

BIODATA

From
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Greatest Hits
Miro has written three novels as Steven Price: *Into That Darkness* (2011), *By Gaslight* (2016) and *Lampedusa* (2019). He's also won two major awards for his poetry.

Random Fact
Miro's great-grandfather, AE Price, started a locksmith business on settling in Vancouver. Today, Price's Alarms is Canada's oldest private security firm.



look in detail at the kinds of lives our forebears enjoyed or endured – a fabulous resource for world-building.

Victorian London in particular fascinates Miro because of its multiculturalism. "I'm a Canadian, and we have this dream of a multicultural society, where people can be embraced for their differences," he says, "and don't have to deny one identity, one world, in order to be accepted and to be a part of a new one. If you believe in that idea, Victorian London becomes this fascinating, early prototype of how much we can enrich each other with our differences."

Miro's parents encouraged him to follow his own interests in life. "I'm sure that they had deep concern for the fact that my passion was poetry," he says. "But they never once expressed any reservation about it, or even hinted that I should think of something more practical."

LOOK OUT!

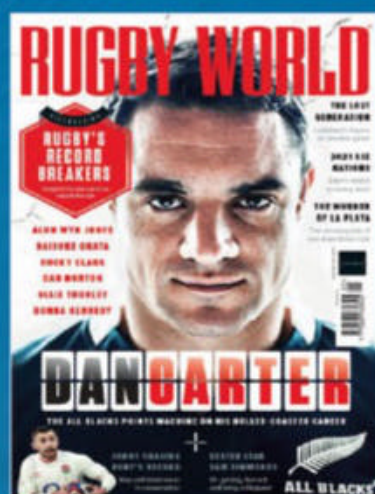
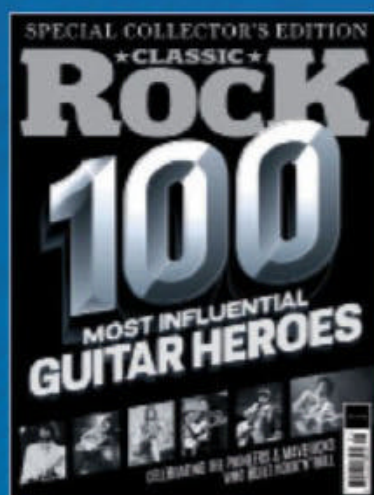
At the University of Victoria, where he himself subsequently taught – "There's not a lot of money in poetry" – his teachers included the poets Lorna Crozier and Patrick Lane, a powerhouse literary couple who had "this idea of poetry as being supranational, exceeding borders".

The American poetic tradition, which he encountered when he studied for an MFA at the University of Virginia, was very different. It "seemed to stand at the edges of its borders and look inward." That's not to say American poets – and Price was taught by major figures such as Charles Wright, Rita Dove and Gregory Orr – weren't aware of the wider world. It's more a case of those living in a superpower finding "figuring themselves out" a big enough subject in itself. Think of how the journeys in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* largely, bar a brief sojourn in Mexico, take place across the vastness of the USA.

This introspection is not a luxury Canadian writers can afford, even though the country is geographically huge. "[When] you exist as a satellite of a great superpower, it's natural that you define yourself in relation to that superpower," says Miro. "So as a general approach to the world, you're looking *past* your border, and looking outside of yourself to figure out who you are, and what you're not." We're back, circuitously, to Canadian multiculturalism. You can't help thinking of that "isolated" child back in the '80s, and the way *Ordinary Monsters* is written to that child. As Miro says of the fantasy he first read as a boy, "Those stories really have not been absent for me, as a person, in my life." ●

Ordinary Monsters is published by Bloomsbury on 7 June.

“Children’s
literature is
almost
overwhelmingly
imaginative
literature”



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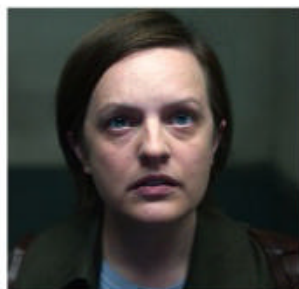
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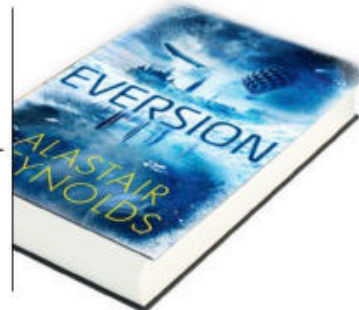
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DOCTOR STRANGE IN THE MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS

Strange In Loads Of Strange Lands



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 126 minutes

▶ Director **Sam Raimi**

▶ Cast **Benedict Cumberbatch, Elizabeth Olsen, Xochitl Gomez, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Benedict Wong**

❖ **Strange, you say? You want really strange?** You got it, though it's not immediately apparent. Anyone expecting something a little different from original *Spider-Man* trilogy director Sam Raimi on his return to the Marvelverse may initially be a little disappointed to see how far he's prepared to play by the MCU rules with this *Doctor Strange* sequel. But then it all goes a bit *Looney Tunes* – quite literally at one point.

Don't get too excited, though. In many clearly obvious ways this is still very much a carefully-managed, quip-filled MCU "product". Raimi, though, has fun seeing how far he can push things.

And the more Raimi the movie becomes, the more interesting it becomes. Especially in terms of the horror. Horror? Oh yes. Don't be fooled by that 12A certificate. There may not be much actual gore on show, but conceptually there are some particularly gut-churning images, especially a couple of inventively icky deaths. There are even homages to *Carrie* and *The Ring*. And a zombie...

Steven Strange has guest-starred in so many MCU movies since his cinematic debut that it's slightly odd to note that this is, in fact, the first official *Doctor Strange* sequel. A lot has changed in the meantime, not least the opening up of the multiverse, which this film tackles head on.

Don't worry, you don't need an encyclopaedic knowledge of the TV shows and films to enjoy *Multiverse Of Madness*, though if you have no idea what happened in *Wandavision*, one plot thread may leave you a little mystified.

"Oh Christ, I think we've left the oven on."



Hopefully those don't smell of Gwyneth.



The film opens with Strange having a nightmare in which an alternate version of himself tries to rescue a teenage girl from a Lovecraftian monstrosity in some bizarre realm. Except it isn't a nightmare. Dreams, we're told, are just messages from alternate realities ("In one, I have a ponytail," gasps Strange, appalled).

Pretty soon after, the girl from Strange's nightmare appears in New York, with the cousin of that kaiju from the climax of *The Suicide Squad* in tow. Strange and Wong take down the one-eyed squid and discover that the girl,

“There's a genuinely human story underlying all this action”

America (Xochitl Gomez), has the ability to port between alternate realities, although she can't control the ability. And someone is chasing her across the multiverse to take that power from her. That somebody turns out to be... okay, SPOILERS coming. It's difficult to discuss the film without revealing who, so this is your final warning.



It's Wanda, or the fully-fledged Scarlet Witch, as she's now become. And boy, does she make a great villain. Raimi doesn't just put the strange in Doctor Strange, he puts the Witch in Scarlet Witch, and some of their supernatural sparring is just phenomenal. This isn't just a CG-fest. It's CG used to produce cinematic art with a gonzo, punky energy.

Well, sometimes. Other times we just get more cartoony giant monsters that we've already seen too much of in *Shang-Chi* and *Eternals*. But you'll forget those, while the more extraordinary

images will linger. Especially cake world...

The plot is the usual threadbare Marvel fare – take away all the fancy dressing and it's pretty much a linear quest for a mystic whatnot. There's also a feeling that the movie is trying to do way too much in terms of fan-service. Sure, the surprise, franchise-entwining cameos are fun (there are a couple of Charlie Cox-style ones to make you go "Oooh!") but they come at the cost of the pacing, which lurches headlong from revelation to revelation, rather than giving the ideas and characters room.

Having said that, there's a genuinely human story underlying all this action, which leads to one of the most satisfying climaxes to an MCU movie yet, fuelled by some excellent performances all round.

It's just a shame that the emotional core is so often drowned by the madness. But for connoisseurs of exquisite weirdness, there are plenty of WTF moments here to embrace.

Dave Golder

i Oddly, the BBFC gave some of the trailers a 15 rating, but the film is a 12A. They're citing "context" as the reason.



SAM RAIMI

Director of *In The Multiverse Of Madness*



How did the script change once you came on board?

→ We tried once to rewrite it, because there was no time, but it didn't really work. So Michael [Waldron] and I said, "We've got to start over." Michael dove in and wrote a completely original story, which kept changing until the last day of production.

How was it coming back to superhero films?

→ I kept my eye off superhero films. I mean, I loved *Iron Man* and the first *Avengers*, but then I had kind of a superhero withdrawal. So I haven't seen many of them. The great thing is, I had to fight for things 20 years ago. I'd have to say, "Sony, I need six artists today, and six storyboard artists." "You can't have any of that. This is pre-production." They weren't ready for that. I get into Marvel, and I say, "Here's the bad news: I need six storyboard artists today, and six pre-vis guys." And Kevin Feige goes, "You've got 12 pre-vis guys today, and 12 storyboard artists."

When did you find out about Tobey Maguire's role in *No Way Home*?

→ The first day I came in, [producer] Amy Pascal whispered in my ear that was happening. I just laughed my head off! **JF**

GETTY

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE

Depth and taxes



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 139 minutes

► Directors **Daniel Kwan, Daniel Scheinert**

► Cast **Michelle Yeoh, Ke Huy Quan, Stephanie Hsu, Jamie Lee Curtis**

► **A crazed music video where a man smashes through an apartment building; a touching**

buddy comedy in which Paul Dano bonds with a farting corpse. If the prior work of directing duo Daniels – aka Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert – vibrates on the same wavelength as your brain, then chances are you’ve been keenly anticipating their latest work. And it doesn’t disappoint on any front: the weird, the funny and

the heartfelt elements that punctuate their projects are all present and correct here, and in even more impressive form.

Michelle Yeoh, handed a role that truly uses her abilities to the full, is Evelyn Wang, a laundromat owner lodged in a nightmare audit with tax official Deirdre Beaubeirdra (Jamie Lee Curtis, dowdy and officious). She’s also worried that her daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu, a ball of late-teens heartache and frustration) can’t connect with her father (screen legend James Hong) over Joy’s life choices. Then there’s husband Waymond (Ke Huy Quan of *Temple Of Doom* fame, who proves here that he’s been just as criminally underutilised as Yeoh), who’s planning to divorce Evelyn just to get her attention. When he’s taken over by a multiverse version of himself to contact Evelyn and convince her to fight a threat that crosses dimensions, all manner of strangeness kicks in. How strange? Try alt-Evelyn in a loving relationship with Deirdre in a parallel universe where humans have sausages for hands.

There are incredibly well-choreographed martial arts scenes, a nod to the work of Wong Kar-wai, a scene simply featuring rocks that looks to make you sob and more versions of the main characters than the Peter Parkers of *Into The Spider-Verse* and *No Way Home* combined.

Which is not to say it’s simply wacky for wackiness’ sake: *Everything Everywhere* has its mind on inter-generational trauma, depression, loneliness, reconnecting with loved ones and more. It might be influenced by the likes of *The Matrix*, *The One* and even, at points, Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil*, but it’s no lazy genre pudding, whisking all this into a fresh-feeling cocktail of high-energy action, emotional resonance and possibly the funniest riff on a Pixar movie.

It’s rare to have a film that works on so many levels, but *Everything Everywhere* is a head trip that also possesses a brain.

James White

i Jackie Chan was the original thought for the lead, but the role was then re-written for his *Police Story 3* co-star Yeoh.



EARWIG



► **RELEASED 10 JUNE**

TBC | 114 minutes

► Director **Lucile Hadzihalilovic**

► Cast **Paul Hilton, Romane**

Hemelaers, Romola Garai, Peter Van den Begin

► **Lucile Hadzihalilovic’s** adaptation of Brian Catling’s 2019 surrealist novel is an inscrutable, intoxicating mood piece. Albert (Paul Hilton) is a guardian tasked with watching over Mia (Romane Hemelaers), a young girl with dentures made of ice that must be regularly and painfully replaced. When a call from Albert’s master informs him that she should be prepared to leave in 13 days time, their strange, isolated existence starts to come apart at the seams.

Things happen in *Earwig*, but at a deliberate pace. It’s 24 minutes before a word is spoken, 31 before we leave the house’s gloomy interior to a misty murky, ambiguously European country sometime after the Second World War. The film lulls you with its artful quietude, but is fraught with unease. An inexplicable encounter with a stranger in a bar seems to invoke the Mystery Man sequence from *Lost Highway*, while a curious B-plot following Céleste (Romola Garai) leaves you questioning the nature of the characters’ reality.

It isn’t an easy film but is a beautiful one, lensed claustrophobically by DoP Jonathan Ricquebourg and blanketed in unnerving sound design. It will frustrate those seeking a conventional narrative, but its crepuscular strangeness is rewarding in its own right. **Will Salmon**



“Get back! The spin cycle is about to kick in!”



ALL MY FRIENDS HATE ME

With friends like these...



▶ **RELEASED** 10 JUNE

15 | 93 minutes

▶ Director **Andrew Gaynord**

▶ Cast **Tom Stourton, Dustin Demi-Burns, Georgina Campbell**

➔ **There is nothing more British** than our penchant for casual cruelty disguised as having a laugh. This is banter island. Insults are traded as terms of endearment, sincerity mercilessly mocked.

It's a national quirk exploited for maximum unease in Andrew Gaynord's feature debut, a comedy where every laugh carries an undercurrent of psychological horror. Co-writer Tom Stourton is the anxious Pete, who turns up at a reunion of his posh former uni

pals at a country mansion to find it gatecrashed by piss-taking local Harry (Dustin Demi-Burns).

Pete can't shake the feeling that he's nursing a grudge. Why does he seem so intent on humiliating him? And why is he so familiar? Like the film itself, Harry is compellingly pitched between menace and charisma, and will keep you guessing as to how paranoid Pete really is.

There are a couple of plotting missteps, but the script is so well-observed, doing a deft job of playing with your sympathies and expectations, that these are easily forgiven. **Stephen Kelly**

i Tom Stourton was inspired by going to a wedding and convincing himself that he'd only been invited as a joke.

MEN



They're just normal men



▶ **RELEASED** 1 JUNE

15 | 100 minutes

▶ Director **Alex Garland**

▶ Cast **Jessie Buckley, Rory Kinnear, Paapa Essiedu, Gayle Rankin**

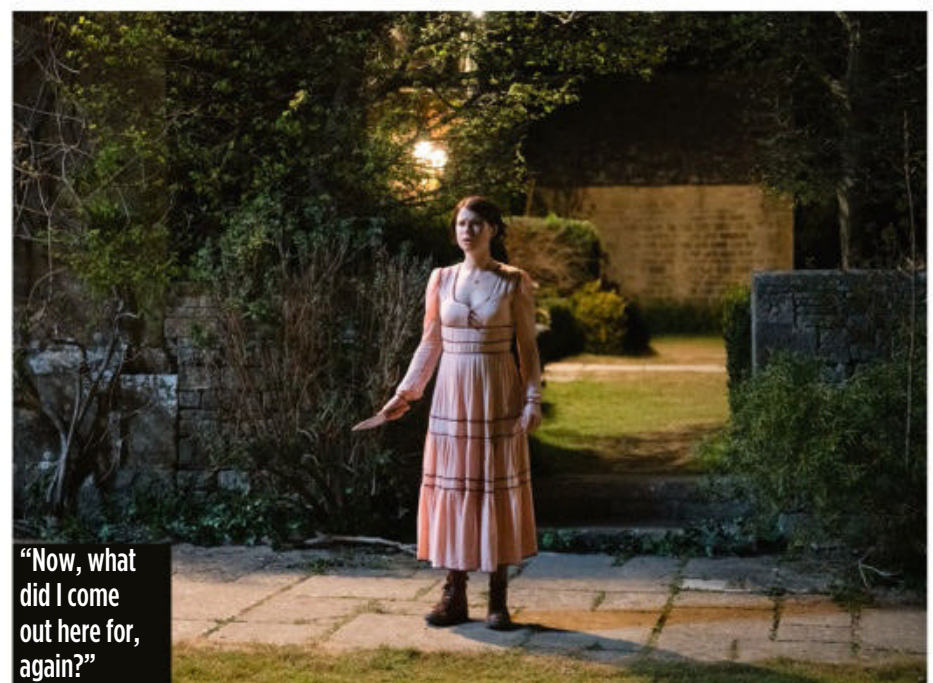
➔ **The claustrophobic unease of** *Ex Machina*. The corrupted bodies of *Annihilation*. The nightmarish fatalism of *Devs*. Lurking beneath the cerebral science fiction of writer/director Alex Garland has always been an undercurrent of horror. In his new film, he embraces the genre completely with a feminist folk horror that's as elegant as it is disturbing, as thought-provoking as it is emotional and abstract.

Jessie Buckley plays Harper, a young woman who has retreated to the English countryside after the death of her abusive husband (Paapa Essiedu). She seeks a place

of solitude where she can heal, but finds herself haunted by a series of male locals. There's a toffish landlord, a sinister vicar, a foul-mouthed child. A naked man who stalks her through the woods. All of whom – including the child – are played to disconcerting effect by Rory Kinnear.

There is something mysterious humming in the background of the story. Is it a subversive riff on Eve, who, like Harper, ate an apple from a tree and caused Adam to view her body with shame? The explicit references to pagan symbols of death and rebirth suggest it isn't so simple and convenient as that.

What is obvious is how Kinnear's characters reflect Harper's perception of men, perverted after years of being blamed for the thoughts and feelings in their heads.



As is to be expected of Garland, this misogynistic nightmare is masterfully constructed. There's a bleak beauty to his sodden English countryside, both comforting and uncomfortable, while a sequence involving an intruder outside Harper's home, lurking in the periphery of the viewer's vision, is a gripping piece of horror direction. As it reaches its final act,

Men becomes increasingly grotesque and surreal, building and building until it reaches a climax that is more poetry than prose. This is Garland directing with his gut. The result is a film to be felt first, and thought about for a long time after. **Stephen Kelly**

i Filming took place in Withington, a village in the Cotswolds, including at the 12th century Church of St Michael.



“Cor blimey, it’s only me bleedin’ reflection!”

DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

Steven or Marc wake up somewhere unexpected.

Someone says, “Gift shop” (two swigs if it’s “Steven Grant of the gift shop”).

You see a new pyramid for the first time.

You see the Moon.



Steven and Marc have a conversation via a mirror.

Either Steven or Marc demand to be given control of their shared body.

Someone insults Khonshu with a bird reference.

MOON KNIGHT Season One

A marvellous Knight for a Moon dance



UK/US Disney+, all streaming now

Showrunner **Jeremy Slater**

Cast **Oscar Isaac, May Calamawy, Karim El Hakim, F Murray Abraham, Ethan Hawke, Ann Akinjirin**

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 And now for something completely different. Or is it? A Marvel series about a superhero with mental health issues, featuring trippy scenes in an asylum? *Legion*, right? Actually, no, it’s the MCU’s latest TV offering, and despite some plot similarities it’s a very different beast to Noah Hawley’s psychedelic, brain-frying show. Not that its without its own delightfully bonkers moments.

Moon Knight is hardly one of Marvel’s A-listers, but he is one of

their more complex superheroes. This series, while not following any specific comics storyline, shuffles elements from various pre-existing plotlines to present his origin in an intriguing new way. If you have no previous knowledge of the character, the series opens with an enticing mystery: why does geeky museum gift shop guy Steven Grant keep waking up in unexpected places, having lost time? Even if you know what’s going on, it’s fun watching Steven work it out. Straight off, this marks out *Moon Knight* as a superhero series with a USP.

It turns out Steven has a dissociative identity disorder, and his other personality, Marc Spector, moonlights as a superpowered henchman for an

Egyptian god. From here the series turns into a bizarre, horror-tinged mix of *Indiana Jones* and *Percy Jackson*, before turning completely bonkers with a visit to an afterlife that could be Marc in therapy trying to come to terms with an abusive past.

The show benefits massively from a compelling central performance from Oscar Isaac, playing two distinct characters under enormous stress. He’s magnificent, especially when acting against himself, even if his English accent is frankly bizarre (though there is an in-story excuse for that). Ethan Hawke brings a chilling dignity to the villainous Arthur Harrow, who wants to free an Egyptian crocodile god. And May Calamawy makes a creditable

stab at Lara Croft as Marc’s kick-ass archeologist ex-wife.

There’s loads to enjoy here, from amusing supporting characters to great fight scenes, stylish production design and the fun of watching Steven and Marc swapping between different super-suits. It’s a shame, though, that we never get to see Moon Knight early on just doing Moon Knight business – it’s difficult for viewers to get a handle on the character’s usual MO. Certainly, some of the *Tomb Raider* antics in the mid-season episodes – which feel a little filler-y and slow down the pace – could have been sacrificed for a bit more world- and character-building up front.

The series ends on a high, though, with one unresolved mystery blown open in a superb end credits extra scene that will have comic fans punching the air, and newbies recovering their jaws from the floor. **Dave Golder**

i There are QR codes visible in episodes one and five, which, when scanned, give you a free digital copy of *Moon Knight* #1.

SHINING VALE Season One She'll be there for you



UK STARZPLAY, streaming now

US STARZ, streaming now

► Creators Jeff Astrof, Sharon Horgan

► Cast Courteney Cox, Greg Kinnear, Gus Birney, Mira Sorvino

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 Your tolerance for this horror sitcom will probably depend upon how bored you get watching Courteney Cox saying “fuck” 600 times an episode. If you’re quite happy to see her character Patricia swearing at her teenage children and constantly talking about “fucking” as though she personally invented it, enjoy. If that sounds tiresome, you might also falter at *Shining Vale*’s cheesy concept and irritating logic, not to mention the

fact that it rips off *The Shining* in more ways than just its name.

Cox is an author desperately trying to summon her muse for her difficult second novel – then finding it in the ghost of Mira Sorvino’s ’50s housewife Rosemary, who literally ghost-writes the book for her. The problem? Rosemary is homicidal and wants Patricia to murder her gormless husband, nympho daughter and masturbation-obsessed son. But most of the

“Rips off *The Shining* in more ways than just its name”



“Actually, can I just have a slim Frappuccino?”

show – endless, tedious hours of it – focuses on Patricia hearing a noise or seeing something weird, investigating, getting a BIG SHOCK and then waking up with a jolt; it was a dream!

There are a few genuinely funny lines, and Greg Kinnear has a lot of fun as Patricia’s long-suffering hubby – the one character who seems to exist in a sitcom while the rest flounder between genres.

And Cox does her best with the script’s rickety, occasionally downright insulting presentation of a woman who is legitimately depressed and not taken seriously by doctors. The season finale, however, lets down her and everybody else... including the viewers. **Jayne Nelson**

i “This is for you, Patricia!” someone says as they jump from a window, paraphrasing a similar moment in 1976’s *The Omen*.

THE RISING Gone Girl



UK Sky Max, Fridays/all streaming on NOW

► Showrunner Pete McTighe

► Cast Clara Rugaard, Nicholas Gleaves, Matthew McNulty, Nenda Neururer

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 Imagine, if you will, *Broadchurch* as penned by MR James. Or maybe *Randall And Hopkirk (Deceased)* redone as a bleak Scandi-noir drama.

This supernatural crime thriller opens with 19-year-old Neve Kelly (a brilliant Clara Rugaard) floating in a lake. After pulling herself out she walks home, only to discover that her mum, frantic with worry about her daughter’s whereabouts, can’t see her. Neve is dead, you see, and it soon transpires that she was murdered. Only her last hours are a blur. She can’t remember how she died, where, or who killed her.

Luckily, she has two links to the physical world: her hard-drinking dad and Alex, a fellow teen she met at a party the night she died.

If all this rings a distant bell, then you’ve probably caught the Belgian series *The Rising* is based on. Thankfully for Sky, 2017’s *Hotel Beau Séjour* didn’t hit as big as other Euro dramas that have been remade for English-language audiences, so *The Rising* stands a better chance of being judged on its own, quite considerable merits.

A high five to lead writer Pete McTighe (whose credits also include *Doctor Who*’s “Kerblam!”)

“Initially at least, wears its supernatural clothes lightly”



“I think I’m out of my depth. Ghost humour.”

and “Praxeus”) for crafting a series that, initially at least, wears its supernatural clothes lightly, telling a story that’s chock full of twists and intrigue, while a heavy emotional fog hangs over every episode. That bleakness is bolstered by the Lake District location, with its damp, desolate terrain as much a character here as any of the various suspects.

With its unique blend of ghost

story and social-realist crime thriller, *The Rising* feels thrillingly fresh, each genre giving the other a much-needed shot in the arm. And, unusually for a whodunnit, the denouement doesn’t disappoint, with the series ending on a poignant and very definite full-stop. **Steve O’Brien**

i This is only a remake of the first series of *Hotel Beau Séjour*. Series two of the Belgian show told a different story.

SHINING GIRLS

Peep In Time



UK/US Apple TV+, Fridays

► Showrunner Silka Luisa

► Cast Elisabeth Moss, Wagner Moura, Jamie Bell, Phillipa Soo

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **Anyone jonesing** for the return of *The Handmaid's Tale* could probably fend off the shakes with this one-off series, which foregrounds Elisabeth Moss as another determined young woman overcoming misogyny. This time it's embodied in an individual, one who ticks the "superficial charm" box on the psychopath checklist, and whose tells include mansplaining, unsolicited beauty advice and inappropriate touching.

Based on Lauren Beukes's 2013 novel (the title refers to young women bursting with potential), it centres on Moss's Kirby Maxrachi

(not her real name), an archive clerk at the Chicago Sun-Times in 1992. As the survivor of a brutal assault by an unknown assailant, Kirby realises – when a woman's body is found in an old tunnel – that she narrowly escaped a serial killer. One with a difference, as Jamie Bell's Harper Curtis is able, via mysterious means, to somehow travel backwards and forwards in time to carry out his crimes.

It's a brilliantly simple concept, chilling in the execution: how much worse would it be if a stalker could insinuate himself throughout your timeline, from childhood to the present day? Able to stand exactly where he knows, from observation, that he'll remain unnoticed, Harper practically becomes Kirby's shadow. And there's a fiendish ingenuity to the way he toys with his future

victims. As he plays the sounds of their own death to them, it's like a sci-fi version of Michael Powell classic *Peeping Tom*.

Moss is exceptional in the leading role, investing Kirby with both vulnerability and damage and steely determination. As she teams up with alcoholic reporter Dan Velazquez (Wagner Moura), what follows is an absorbing spin on the classic investigative template, one with some fascinating wrinkles.

For starters, Kirby's world keeps changing around her, requiring her to keep notes of what her job is, what her pet is and so on. She can return home to find she doesn't live there any more, or that a co-worker is now her husband. Kirby is always a fan of Godzilla, though – how could you not like this woman?

Quite why her *notes* (or memories) aren't rewritten is just one of several puzzling aspects. The changes to Kirby's world

“A thoroughly satisfying, perfectly self-contained piece of work”

seem to be random, rather than a matter of cause and effect. And when you think about it, how could *anyone* escape from a serial killer who has the option to go back in time to finish the job, as many times as is required? This is a question that's underlined once we've seen the resolution. But we can suspend disbelief. This kind of thing is in the nature of time travel stories. Simply blame the Butterfly Effect, or assume that Harper enjoys a challenge, as long the odds are still stacked in his favour.

It's almost a shame that *Shining Girls* is just a limited series... But actually, here's hoping they *don't* make any more, because this is a thoroughly satisfying, perfectly self-contained piece of work which never sags or threatens to outstay its welcome, one that ends triumphantly in more senses than one. **Ian Berriman**

i In the TV series, Harper gives the young Kirby a blue wooden Pegasus. In the novel, it's an orange plastic horse.



DOCTOR WHO: LEGEND OF THE SEA DEVILS



UK: BBC One, now on iPlayer

Also on Blu-ray/DVD from 23 May

► Showrunner Chris Chibnall

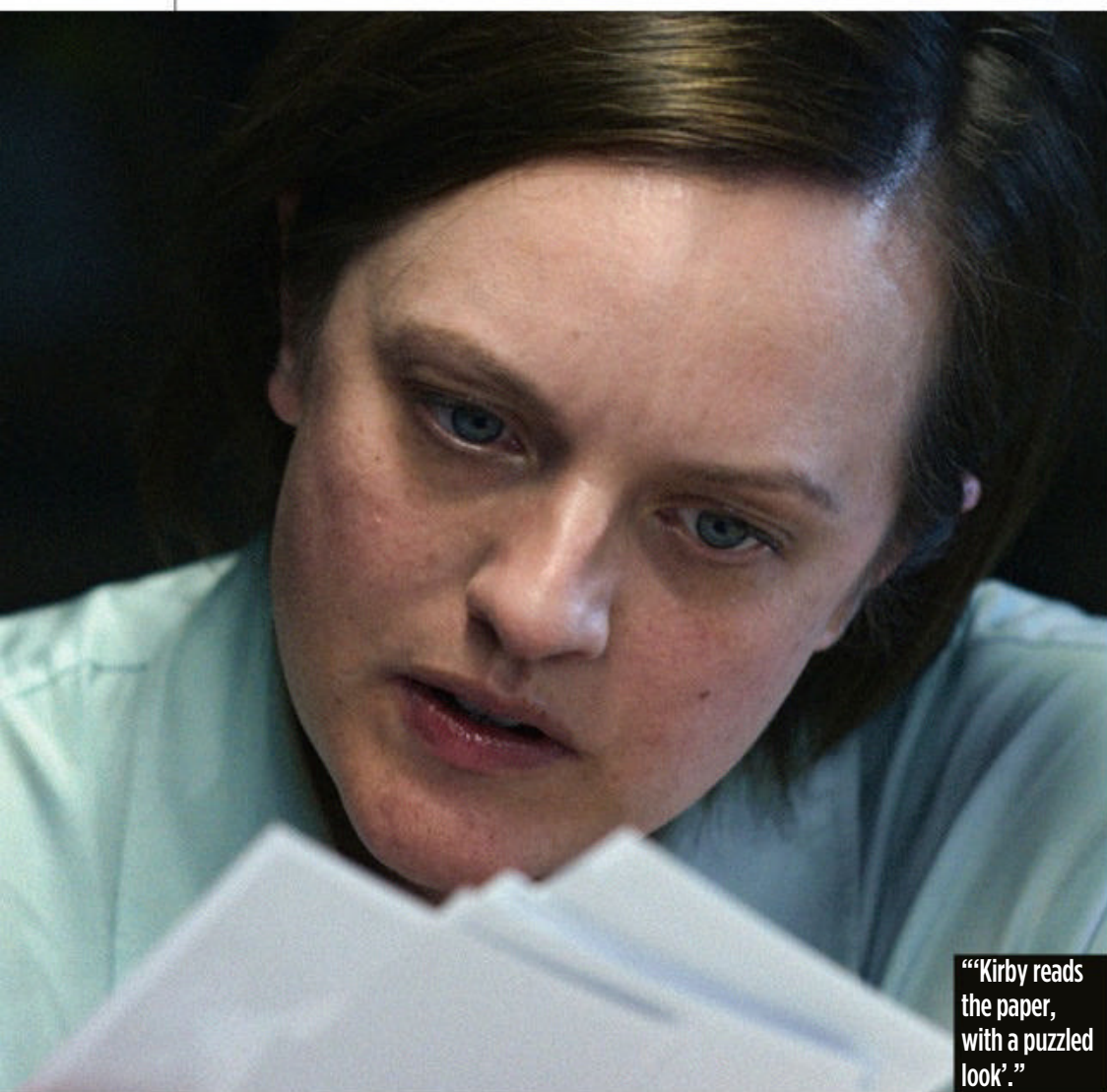
► Cast Jodie Whittaker, Mandip Gill, John Bishop, Crystal Yu

SPECIAL **It's business as usual** with *Who's* Easter treat, which gives the Doctor an obscure historical personage to excitedly yelp the name of, then saddles Jodie Whittaker with gabbling expository dialogue you can only make sense of once you rewatch on iPlayer with the subtitles turned on.

Once you have, the story just about hangs together, as long it doesn't occur to you to ask why the MacGuffin driving the story couldn't have been recovered before it was shielded from view. Or how 16th century humans had the wherewithal to harness its tech. Or where that ruddy great sea monster disappeared to.

Still, hats off to all involved in resurrecting the Sea Devils; one risible videogame leap aside, they look more powerful and dignified than they ever did in their classic series appearances. The way the costumes subtly incorporate their fishing net fashion is a clever touch, and their newfound ability to materialise in a mist is a wise move, given how daft they look when they run. Can we have proper Silurians now, RTD?

Though no classic – and overshadowed by the promise of Ace and Tegan's return – it's an improvement on *Who's* last piratical adventure. Mind you, that's a bar so low you could step over it... **Calvin Baxter**



“Kirby reads the paper, with a puzzled look”

NOUGHTS + CROSSES Series Two Nowhere To Run



UK BBC One, all on iPlayer

▶ Director Koby Adom

▶ Cast Masali Baduza, Jack Rowan, Helen Baxendale, Paterson Joseph

EPISODES 2.01-2.04 It took so long for another series of this TV take on Malorie Blackman's YA book to be announced that we rather assumed the axe had fallen. And this abbreviated second run arrives so belatedly that you'd be forgiven for struggling to revive a feeling of being invested.

Once again we're in Albion, an alternate Britain ruled by an African empire, where "Noughts" (whites) are oppressed by "Crosses" (blacks). When we left star-crossed lovers Callum and Sephy, they'd gone on the run.

Picking up a month later, season two takes a very different route to the book on its way to the same tear-jerking conclusion. The first half maintains the couple's fugitive status. Then they quit running and try to negotiate with Sephy's father, Albion's ruthless PM (the ever-reliable Paterson Joseph). A secondary interracial romance featuring Callum's brother Jude is one of the better innovations.

As before, it's a series with some impressive design work – especially in the hair and costuming departments. Once again, realism is not a high priority – this is a world where Britain's Most Wanted can pop round mum's without anyone noticing; where the PM turns up in person at police raids; where you can quit



"I really fancy some pickled onion Monster Munch."

or rejoin terrorist organisations willy-nilly as you choose.

And if anything, it's become even more soapy. Earnest heart-to-hearts outnumber action scenes by at least 10 to one. There are more emotional conversations in kitchens than a month's worth of *EastEnders*. It also feels like Covid has had an impact on the scope of the drama – a prison riot should probably involve more

than about five people...

Still, lachrymose and implausible though it may be, there's no denying the sweetness of the central romance, or the chemistry of the series' young leads. We're glad they got a shot at their tragic closure.

Ian Berriman

i Jude also falls for a Cara in the second book, but in that she's a black hairdresser, not a mixed-race cleaner.

OUTER RANGE Season One Way Out West



UK/US Prime Video, all streaming now

▶ Creator Brian Watkins

▶ Cast Josh Brolin, Imogen Poots, Lili Taylor, Tom Pelphrey

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 It's less "Home On The Range" and more "Hole On The Range" in this oddball show, which brings high weirdness to rural Wyoming.

Josh Brolin is Royal Abbott, grandfather of a family of cattle ranchers, who discovers a bottomless void on his land – one which can act as a portal to other times and places. It's not his only problem. His daughter-in-law went missing nine months ago. His neighbours, the Tillersons, have staked a claim to the pasture containing the hole. Then his son

Perry gets into a fight with a Tillerson, leaving a corpse to be disposed of. It's a right Royal mess.

There are two tones at work, and the tension between them is very interesting. Often the series is in realist mode, depicting a timeless world of good ol' boy bars, Sunday communion and rodeo tournaments. Then it'll turn mystic/cosmic, or throw in quirky characterisation. There's a *Twin Peaks* tinge to the way Billy Tillerson (Noah Reid) incongruously belts out hits like "Save The Best For Last" and the wild-eyed monologues his sickly father (Will Patton) launches into. *Lost* is another touchstone, with an ominous buffalo as the series' polar bear. Brolin is a strong gravitational centre as the grizzled



"I could go for some Cheetos and Mountain Dew."

patriarch, whose close-mouthed nature makes scenes where he breaks down doubly poignant.

It's a beautifully crafted series, full of stunning vistas and dreamily slow transitions. And hats off to the music coordinator, who drops in cuts by the likes of Scott Walker, Moondog and Kris Kristofferson.

Sci-fi fans may find Abbott's lack of interest in investigating

further frustrating. But a brilliant penultimate-episode twist makes sense of that. With a finale rug-pull providing another strong hook, and the void's potential barely explored, it's a show which should seduce anyone with a taste for classic Americana or Lynchian weirdness. **Ian Berriman**

i The local cinema is showing obscure 1970 film *The Phantom Tollbooth* – about a gateway to an enchanted kingdom.

THE INNOCENTS

Suffer little children

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 20 MAY/6 JUNE

2022 | 15 | Download 20 May

(also in selected cinemas), VOD 6 June

▶ Director **Eskil Vogt**

▶ Cast **Rakel Lenora Fløttum**,
Alva Brynsmo Ramstad, **Sam Ashraf**,
Mina Yasmin Bremseth Asheim

➔ **Young children can be very** cruel sometimes, especially if they haven't yet fully developed a sense of empathy for the emotions and physical pain of others. What if that tendency to do things like pinch your sister was combined with the kind of fantastical abilities that we more usually see on-screen being employed with confident control by adults, or tentatively explored by teenagers?

That's the question at the heart of the latest film by writer/director Eskil Vogt, who previously tackled

slightly similar themes with his script for the *Carrie*-esque *Thelma*. Set in a nondescript Norwegian housing estate, it's tightly focused on four kids aged seven to 11. Adults are very much background figures here, and the parents have no awareness of what's going on in the secret world of their children.

Early on, these are not exactly the sort of abilities that would draw the attention of Professor Xavier: moving a bottle top slightly as it falls; keeping a pan lid spinning on the floor. But as the children's inexplicable powers grow in scope, encompassing things such as snapping a tree in half and telepathically controlling random grown-ups, they become increasingly dangerous – especially when wedded to the boundary testing and childish vengefulness of Ben (Sam Ashraf).

Making use of slow zooms, lens flare and warm summery tones, and set to a score of unobtrusive thrums and gongs, it's a plausibly realist take on the sort of scenario that usually inexorably leads to a pitched battle with a multi-million-dollar effects budget. But there are no buildings being wrecked or cars being flipped here, and the final showdown, when it comes, is deliberately anticlimactic.

While Vogt says that he didn't set out to make a film which defines itself in opposition to the superhero blockbusters which dominate today's cinematic landscape, viewers probably can't help but experience it that way, and the contrast is sometimes wryly comical. You don't get a hero calling round the supervillain's house and inviting

“There are no buildings being wrecked or cars being flipped”

them out to play in the MCU. Neither, usually, does the characterisation pull your sympathies to and fro. Ben is effectively the villain of the piece, and some of his actions are truly shocking, but his tearful reactions afterwards remind you that this is just a confused young boy with a lack of impulse control.

Horribly tense at times, as we wait for Ben's next experiment or piece of score-settling (with some distressing animal cruelty early on cleverly clueing us in as to quite how poor his boundaries are), it's a refreshingly different, sensitively handled arthouse approach to story concepts that are usually the domain of the multiplex.

Ian Berriman

i One inspiration was *Domu*, a manga by *Akira* creator Katsuhiro Otomo featuring a child with extrasensory powers.



MIND
PROBE

ESKIL VOGT

Writer and director
of *The Innocents*



What were the challenges of making this film?

➔ One is that we were making a scary movie during a Scandinavian summer, and the sun sets at 11 at night. So in all the scenes it's daylight, usually sunshine. Fear of the dark is such a primal thing, and I couldn't use that. We had to find other ways of creating a sense of dread. We used empty locations a lot. It's during the summer holiday, so suddenly you have a playground that feels abandoned. The sound design was important. We didn't want to use that bass drone, it exhausts you after a while. We tried to find other solutions: to slow down some of the music and blend it into the sound design so it gave you this unreal feeling.

What was your approach to violence?

➔ Make it count. What I love about horror movies is that you're having a real visceral experience. I think when horror movies go too far into the violence, it becomes a punchline more than scary. When you see someone's head exploding you can't relate, because you have no memory of anything you've experienced that you can project into that moment. But if you see someone with a hammer, hitting a nail, hit a finger, you'll feel it. I really wanted to keep it that way. **IB**

CHRISTIAN BREIDLID



“Aww, Mum's about to call me in, I can sense it.”



THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2021 | 15 | Download

▶ Director Deon Taylor

▶ Cast Mike Epps, Katt Williams, Bresha Webb, Danny Trejo

➔ **This follow-up to 2016's** *Meet The Blacks*, which parodied *The Purge*, sees Carl Black (Mike Epps) and his family faced with a new set of terrors when the house next door is sold to vampiric pimp Dr Mamuwale (Katt Williams).

The character's name suggests a nod to blaxploitation cult classic *Blacula*, but the plot is puzzlingly closer to 1985's *Fright Night*. *The House Next Door* aims towards the comedy end of the horror-comedy spectrum, but Williams and Epps can only do so much with such dismally written jokes.

After the success of *Meet The Blacks* one would expect a decent budget for its sequel, but it's hard to see where any money was spent, as the costuming, sets and special effects all look painfully cheap. There are a few interesting ideas, particularly the drawing of parallels between the sexual freedom in the vampire myth and hip-hop culture, but many of the references and gender politics feel pretty dated. Jokes about pimps and hoes aim to provoke shocked laughs but mostly just land like curious relics from the '90s.

Katt Williams's inherent charm and a few fun cameos help to keep the film's energy up, but by the end of its 97-minute runtime it's hard not to want to drive a stake through its heart. **Leila Latif**



"So, any plans for the weekend, or...?"

HUMAN LANTERNS

A little light murder

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1982 | 18 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Chung Sun

▶ Cast Lau Wing, Chen Kuan-Tai, Lo Lieh, Tien Ni

BLU-RAY DEBUT **This Shaw Brothers**

horror/wuxia hybrid puts a gruesome spin on the Chinese tradition of paper lanterns. At first it looks to have a monstrous antagonist. However, a skulled face, shaggy limbs and claws are just a human villain's costume.

It centres on two grudges: one between rich Lords Lung and Tan; the second between Lung and lantern-maker Chao Chun-Fang, whom he defeated in a fight over a woman many years ago. When Lung hires the latter to make a lantern to best his rival he doesn't account for the vengeful craftsman using skin flayed from kidnapped women, Ed Gein-style.

The resulting torture scenes are pretty hard-edged, although the skin-peeling effects aren't likely to induce fainting. Indeed, they may give those of a certain vintage nostalgic flashbacks to peeling Gloy off their fingertips in primary school. A rape (intercut with the

grinding of a mill's mechanism, in a grim riff on the train-entering-a-tunnel cliché) is rather nastier.

While the film's not as memorably weird as, say, *Black Magic* or *Corpse Mania*, it has well-choreographed battles, with all the impossible leaping about you'd expect. And the set for Chao Chun-Fang's basement workshop is very effective; with its whirling water wheel, a kind of period take on a serial killer's industrial lair.

➔ **Extras** There are interviews with male lead Lau Wing (51 minutes) and female victims Linda Chu (15 minutes) and Susan Shaw (14 minutes) – the latter from 2005, the others recent. Chu remembers being pressured to do nudity but refusing, and both Lau and Chu recall the director getting so carried away instructing his cast that he'd end up in shot!

Unfortunately, muffled sound on the Lau interview (plus what sound like high wind, bird calls and text alerts) makes it hard going. Plus: expert commentary; trailer; fold-out poster; booklet.

Ian Berriman

i After going to Cannes Film Festival, Susan Shaw was accused of being a Chinese spy, and her films banned in Taiwan.



THE RIGHTEOUS

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 10 JUNE**

2021 | TBC | SVOD

▶ Director Mark O'Brien

▶ Cast Henry Czerny, Mark O'Brien, Mimi Kuzyk, Kate Corbett

ARROW "Be careful what you wish for, but be certain what you pray for," intones a priest, in the gloriously portentous scene where *The Righteous* sets out its stall. Mostly a two-hander, this religious horror is a terrifying treat.

Former man of the cloth Frederic (Henry Czerny) is in crisis following the death of his adopted daughter. Some years ago, he committed a serious sin and – at least to his mind – his craving for punishment has now caught up with him. When injured drifter Aaron (writer/director Mark O'Brien) shows up, alternately oozing Southern charm and baby-faced Satanic menace, Frederic fears that his transgressions have kickstarted the End Times...

Fans of the Michael Shannon-starring apocalyptic thriller *Take Shelter* should also dig this (potentially) apocalyptic psychodrama, while the Biblical cat-and-mouse games and impeccably lit black-and-white visuals suggest that O'Brien is aiming to evoke *The Night Of The Hunter* and even *The Seventh Seal*. Inevitably, it doesn't quite reach those giddy heights, but for a debut feature this feels incredibly assured.

Proving that budgetary restraints are all but irrelevant if you know what you're doing, *The Righteous* is a heady combination of tightly controlled performances, careful ambiguity and fantastic dialogue. **Sarah Dobbs**

VAMPYR

It's a Gray area

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 30 MAY

1932 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Carl Theodor Dreyer

▶ Cast Nicolas de Gunzburg, Maurice Schutz, Rena Mandel, Sybille Schmitz

BLU-RAY DEBUT Although filmed around the same time Bela Lugosi was on a Universal soundstage declaiming as Dracula, this almost-silent film by a Danish master is worlds apart, a deliberately confusing emanation of spectral cinema to be bracketed alongside the likes of Jean Cocteau's *Blood Of A Poet* and, arguably, later leftfield one-offs like Herk Harvey's *Carnival Of Souls*.

Though the titles acknowledge inspiration by Sheridan Le Fanu's *In A Glass Darkly*, it only takes fragments from that collection. Elliptical storytelling and

disjunctive editing choices make the plot, such as it is, not easy to apprehend on a single viewing, but essentially it sees blank-slate hero Allan Gray encountering a young woman preyed upon by a female vampire – an old crone, rather than Le Fanu's seductive Carmilla.

Vampyr isn't really about narrative though – or characterisation. That's for the best, since leading man Nicholas de Gunzburg, an aristocrat who financed the film on condition he could star in it, was no actor. His lugubrious blankness works in this context, though: for such a dreamlike film, he's a suitably somnambulant leading man.

No, *Vampyr* is all about mood, and on that level it's a triumph, thanks to its gauzy exteriors, scenically decayed interiors, disembodied human shadows

and stalking camerawork (remarkably fluid for the time). There are indelible images here, most memorably a claustrophobic sequence which traps us inside Grey's perspective as he pictures being screwed inside a coffin and carried off, immobile but seemingly alive and aware.

▶ **Extras** This 2020 restoration is in good shape, though if you *like* background hiss there's the option to select unrestored audio. There are three new bonuses. Firstly, the regulation Kim Newman talking head (22 minutes) assesses the film's place in vampire cinema. Cultural historian David Huckvale is interviewed twice. The first (37 minutes) sees Huckvale, seated at a piano, walking us through Wolfgang Zeller's score, demonstrating the use of tritones, interrupted harmonies and the like, and its echoes of Germanic romantic opera (especially Wagner). In the second (12 minutes), he explains how the film drew on Le Fanu's work.

Other bonuses are ported from the 2008 DVD. They include two commentaries: critic Tony Rayns

“*Vampyr* is all about mood, and on that level it's a triumph”

makes a decent fist of explaining why *Vampyr* is so disconcerting, while famous fan Guillermo del Toro gushes endearingly about how Dreyer's experimentation elevated horror to high art.

A surprisingly diffident Dreyer addresses the style of his oeuvre, film by film, in a 1966 documentary (30 minutes). A visual essay (36 minutes) favours useful making-of insights over the usual tenuous theorising. There's also a louchely articulated biography of de Gunzburg (14 minutes) and two scenes cut by the German censors. Finally, a 100-page book includes rare photos, essays, a 1964 interview with de Gunzburg, and a facsimile of the original Danish programme. **Ian Berriman**

i A character drowns in flour; Dreyer had the idea after seeing plaster of Paris being made while hunting for locations.



SNEAKERELLA

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2022 | 6+ | SVOD

▶ Director Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum

▶ Cast Chosen Jacobs,

Lexi Underwood, Devyn Nekoda, John Salley

DISNEY+ Ready for some sole music? More to the point, are you ready for a ton more terrible sneaker-related puns like that one? “Perfect fit”, “walking in your shoes” and “step up” gags come thick and fast in this hip-hop/R’n’B musical hybrid of Cinderella and sneaker culture. Subtle it ain’t.

In the New York borough of Queens, aspiring sneaker designer El is forced to work in the stockroom of his stepdad's shoe shop. At the launch... sorry, “drop” of a new “kick” from sneaker brand King6, El falls for mysterious girl Kira, not realising she's the daughter of the brand's boss.

Will Kira convince her dad that El's the designer their faltering company needs before the night of a gala ball? Will El's evil stepbrothers ruin El's chances? Will El's fairy godfather solve everything with his magical, er, hose?

Cheery but vacuous, there's little wit here beyond the initial idea. Charismatic performances and energetic dance routines help, but the cheesy songs are unmemorable, and the tone is way too syrupy to appeal to too-cool-for-school sneakerheads; a moment when El and Kira's laces entwine could have even Hallmark Channel viewers chucking up. And considering the film's creditable attempts at inclusivity, it's a bit odd that no one ever mentions sweatshops... **Dave Golder**



“So will you want the pillows to go with that?”



This is why
no one plays
Monopoly any
more.

THE SADNESS

In With The Id Crowd



▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2022 | TBC | SVOD

▶ Director Rob Jabbaz

▶ Cast Berant Zhu, Regina Lei,
Tzu-Chiang Wang

SHUDDER An Infected movie even

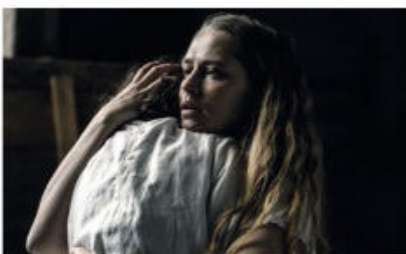
the Marquis de Sade might have blanched at, this Taiwan-set shocker weds the pessimism of George Romero's work, *Society's* orgiastic transgression, and the momentum of *Train To Busan*, to gasp-inducingly bleak effect.

It centres on a young couple, separated when a flu-like infection no one is taking seriously (ring any bells?) mutates. The Alvin virus' new variant has two key symptoms – no, not long sideburns and a penchant for black leather gloves. It makes the affected tear up, and tear it up, as grinning sadists who enact their very worst imaginings.

Showcasing some extreme misogyny, *The Sadness* is definitely not for the faint-hearted, but never quite crosses the line into simply nihilistically revelling in the atrocities it depicts. The camerawork is, thankfully, fairly coy whenever there's a sexual dimension. But what you can imagine is horrific enough.

Perfectly paced to wring maximum tension from the scenario, with well-positioned moments of stillness before the next explosion of carnage, it's also bleakly satirical. On more than one occasion we're left wondering if someone is behaving like an asshole because they're in the early stages of infection, or because that's simply the way people are... **Ian Berriman**

i Garth Ennis's comic *Crossed* was a key inspiration. Director Rob Jabbaz wanted to be "more earnest" and less gratuitous.



THE TWIN



▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2022 | TBC | SVOD

SHUDDER This Finnish (but English language) horror has strong *Midsommar* vibes. A couple move to an old rectory, where their son starts claiming to be his dead twin. You can tell it's a backward, pagan place, as all the locals wear hats.

Annoyingly, after toying with possession/devil worship tropes (hello *that* engraving of Baphomet), a twist that makes little practical sense reveals we've been fed three courses of red herring. Be sure not to be drinking red wine when the reveal comes – it's a devil to get out of the carpet. **Ian Berriman**



FAYE



▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2021 | TBC | Download

➔ A grief-stricken writer is sent to her publisher's cabin in the woods to get some work done, only to be plagued by undead ghouls. Seen it before? Not like this you haven't.

Faye is a one-woman show: Sarah Zanotti is the only person on-camera, and it's not even a camera – this was all shot on an iPhone. It's impressive, then, quite how engaging the film is. Even in the depths of despair, Zanotti makes Faye warm, sympathetic and witty, while the unusual formal elements add originality to a rather tired story. **Sarah Dobbs**



VIRUS:32



▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

2022 | TBC | SVOD

SHUDDER No Covid-19 mythologising here: this Uruguayan thriller predates the pandemic, and as such doesn't have anything to say about it. Instead, director Gustavo Hernández (*The Silent House*) has turned in a perfectly serviceable but completely generic zombie survival horror.

For some unexplained reason, the infected take a break for 32 seconds after each attack. Those dramatic pauses allow for some tense scenes, but there's a strong whiff of early-'00s videogame adaptation. **Sarah Dobbs**



GHOSTS OF THE OZARKS



▶ **RELEASED** 23 MAY

2022 | TBC | Download

➔ A black doctor moves to Norfolk in the Ozarks. The locals are friendly, but there are whispers of ghosts outside the settlement's walls...

Tim Blake Nelson is good value as barman Torb, and Thomas Hobson brings an understated charm to the lead role. The set design impresses too, despite a bland, digital look that jars with the period setting. It's a solid enough folk horror offering that never quite summons the ability to chill or excite. **Will Salmon**



BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 30 MAY

1958 | 12 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Henry Cass

▶ Cast Donald Wolfitt, Vincent Ball, Barbara Shelley, Victor Maddern

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Conjuring**

Transylvania in Twickenham, chasing Hammer's success, this postwar horror is either a bait-and-switch or a canny twist on vampire clichés.

Sir Donald Wolfitt's portly bloodsucker may rock the obligatory velvet and widow's peak, but he dabbles in science, not the supernatural. Hearts are transplanted, blood transfused. Consider this film the product of a madman's tinkering with the natural order: a gruesome hybrid of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, as much about vital organs and specimen jars as stakes and coffins.

➤ **Extras** A new commentary from critics Jonathan Rigby and Kevin Lyons, plus an archival one from producer Robert S Baker, writer Jimmy Sangster, and Hammer guru Marcus Hearn. Rigby fronts an absorbing retrospective (48 minutes), contextualising the movie as part of the British horror boom – and moral panic that accompanied it – of the late '50s; he also presents a history of *Blood's* back-and-forth with the UK censors (21 minutes)

Plus: French and Italian titles (four minutes); a compilation of trailers featuring Scream Queen Barbara Shelley (28 minutes); an Italian photo-strip of the movie from 1964; horror host Dr Terrible's intro from a 1993 BBC One screening; trailer; an impressively comprehensive image gallery. **Nick Setchfield**

Johnny's bonce can hold a whole 128MB of data.



JOHNNY MNEMONIC

A head for numbers

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

1995 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Robert Longo

▶ Cast Keanu Reeves, Dina Meyer, Takeshi, Ice-T

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Nothing dates like**

the future, as *Johnny Mnemonic* proves. Based on a short story by cyberpunk pioneer William Gibson, this tale of a data courier (Keanu Reeves) transporting secrets in his head was made back when the internet and VR were in digital nappies, and its predictions about what they'd look like come 2021 are now quaintly laughable.

But you shouldn't hold that against it – not when there's so much else to... Conceived as a low-budget tech-noir thriller, the film suffered major studio interference that mutated it into a clunky, inelegant, bargain-basement blockbuster. Yet somehow, it retains a cheesy, naive gonzo charm.

➤ **Extras** The main issue here is what's missing: the warmly received black-and-white director's re-edit of the film released in 2021 – especially galling as it's mentioned twice

in the other extras. However, you do get the eight-minutes-longer 1995 Japanese cut, with more screen time for Takeshi, more violence and an alternate score. An odd director's commentary for the theatrical cut takes the form of an interview apparently conducted via mobile phone, while another commentary by *Fangoria* writer Richard Johnson – the one brand new bonus – gleefully points out all the film's shortcomings while highlighting its significance in movie history.

More esoteric is an 11-minute short, "Tomorrow Calling" (1993), based on a Gibson story and made for Channel 4 (not particularly good, but interesting). There's also behind-the-scenes footage (five minutes), a contemporary (and very bland) featurette (five minutes), six sound-bitey, on-set interviews (11 minutes in total) with the stars, Gibson and the director; a music video; and a trailer. The package also includes a booklet and six art cards. Nothing to make your head explode. **Dave Golder**

i When Johnny stands on the roof of a car it's a homage to Rick Deckard doing the same in *Blade Runner*, the director says.



GIRLS NITE OUT

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

1982 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Robert Deubel

▶ Cast Hal Holbrook, Julia

Montgomery, James Carroll, Rutanya Alda

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Just when**

you thought Arrow Video had rediscovered and restored every obscure '80s slasher ever made, here comes another long-forgotten low-budget curiosity...

Girls Nite Out is half *Friday The 13th*, half *Porky's*. Star basketballer Ratliff is dating good girl Lynn but has his eye on someone else, while his teammate Pryor is convinced his girlfriend is cheating on him with the team's dancing bear mascot. But all that hormonally-driven squabbling goes out of the window when someone steals the (incongruously creepy) bear costume and starts slicing their way through the sorority girls.

A mostly inexperienced cast and crew are visibly making things up as they go along, but the resulting chaos is somehow utterly charming. A killer soundtrack covers a multitude of sins; you can't be too critical when there's singalong '60s pop playing in the background...

➤ **Extras** It's clear some serious effort has gone into assembling this package. There's an endearingly enthusiastic and thoughtful commentary by film journos Justin Kerswell and Amanda Reyes, brand new interviews with six of the cast (totalling 82 minutes), and an archival interview with star Julia Montgomery (seven minutes). Plus: trailers; original credits, showcasing the title *The Scaremaker*; booklet.

Sarah Dobbs



TURNING RED

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | PG | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/
DVD/download

▶ Director Domee Shi

▶ Cast Rosalie Chiang, Sandra Oh,
Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, Ava Morse

➔ **Turning Red** turned heads when it was released on Disney+ earlier this year, with some more conservative reviewers struggling with an Asian-Canadian teenage girl protagonist who geeks out over boy bands and – shock horror – hits puberty.

But 13-year-old Mei is a wonderfully real adolescent whose musical obsessions, friendships and maternal clashes will ring true to anyone who once doodled love hearts in the corner of their exercise book. Less so the way she turns into an adorable red panda when emotional, of course. It gets a little silly towards the end, but this is both a paean to female friendships and a fun, heartwarming look at parent-child love as the relationship evolves and changes.

➔ **Extras** An audio commentary by director Domee Shi, DoP Mahyar Abousaeedi and producer Lindsey Collins is full of enthusiasm, and has a few amusing anecdotes, but no great insights. This is the only bonus on the DVD. The Blu-ray and 4K formats add seven pretty inessential deleted scenes and two featurettes. “Life Of A Shot” (15 minutes) strips back the “red peony” bathroom scene and is a fascinating look at just how much work goes into building up an animation, while “Build Your Own Boy Band” (nine minutes) explains 10 simple steps that helped design Mei’s faves 4*TOWN. **Rhian Drinkwater**



BUBBLE

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | SVOD

▶ Director Tetsuro Araki

▶ Cast Jun Shison, Riria,
Zach Aguilar, Emi Lo

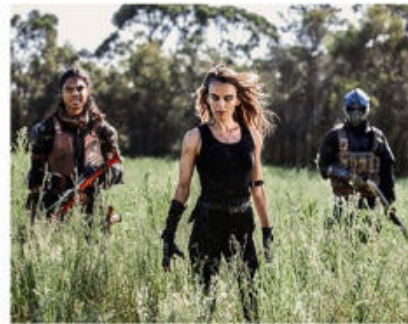
NETFLIX **Coming from the** director and original animation studio behind *Attack On Titan*, *Bubble* lands on Netflix with a hefty weight of expectation, but sadly Tetsuro Araki and Wit Studio have created a work of pure frothiness and precious little substance.

The setting is a near-future Tokyo, where the appearance of mysterious bubbles disrupted gravity, causing the city to flood. The only residents are the youngsters using the water-logged environment to play Tokyo Battlekour, a blend of parkour and capture the flag. (Since the prizes are food, does that mean the losers starve?) Hibiki, the top member of the Blue Blazes team, is saved from drowning one day by a mysterious girl that he names Uta, who was born from the strange bubbles.

Bubble poses a lot of questions but answers almost none of them. The script references *The Little Mermaid*, which provides the model for the relationship between Hibiki and Uta. Unfortunately, Uta is a lazily imagined magical girl with no personality.

The film’s main purpose seems to be to showcase Wit Studio’s animation chops, with parkour scenes that recall the Scout regiment in *Attack On Titan*. Despite all the figures hurtling across the screen, though, the lack of a coherent plot or interesting characters leaves *Bubble* feeling hollow.

David West



WYRMWOOD: APOCALYPSE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Kiah Roache-Turner

▶ Cast Luke McKenzie,
Shantae Barnes-Cowan, Jake Ryan,
Bianca Bradey

➔ **Seven years is a long time** to wait for a sequel to a minor indie horror. Thankfully, this follow-up to Aussie zombie flick *Wyrnwood* is a pretty standalone affair, despite early flashbacks which really only add a degree of confusion.

Three of the cast return, despite one dying last time out (solution: a twin brother). So do a couple of neat innovations: undead whose breath and blood can be used as fuel, and a “hybrid” able to psychically control other zombies.

The subtitle suggests the ramping up that you often get in sequels, but the scope doesn’t extend further than the distance between soldier Rhys’s encampment and the bunker and warehouse he delivers packages to. And there isn’t that much to the story besides gritty, swearsy action, as Rhys first follows orders to capture the survivors from the first film, then launches a rescue once he realises he’s been used.

The production design impresses most. Practically every surface has a grungy patina – even Rhys’s Walkman is caked in filth; these are often rendered more eye-pleasing by lurid lighting, with washes of yellow, green and red. And a monstrous uber-zombie, a claw-handed mashup of Borg and Frankenstein’s Monster, is a gruesome treat.

➔ **Extras** None. **Ian Berriman**



THE FOUND FOOTAGE PHENOMENON

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 19 MAY**

2022 | TBC | SVOD

▶ Director Sarah Appleton,
Phillip Escott

SHUDDER **This feature-length** doc surveys a subgenre that since 2000 has at times felt like it’s completely taken over the landscape of indie horror.

It’s told through interviews with just shy of 30 filmmakers – some responsible for landmark additions to the lineage (*The Blair Witch Project*’s Eduardo Sánchez and *Paranormal Activity*’s Oren Peli), others er, not – with a couple of critics to provide the requisite scattering of jargon. Mercifully, these talking heads are presented in crystal clarity, with drop-out lines and faux murk restricted to the opening titles and clips.

All the bases are efficiently covered: the debt owed to older traditions like the epistolary novel; precursors like Orson Welles’s *War Of The Worlds* broadcast, *Cannibal Holocaust* and *Ghostwatch*; the movies that cut through to become big box office; the blockbusters that aped the style.

It’s a pretty solid Cliffs Notes. Only two things are, arguably, missing. Firstly, any genuinely fascinating making-of anecdotes. Secondly, a little more cynicism about the “democratisation of filmmaking”, as even a fan of found footage has to admit that its success has been responsible for more boring, unoriginal movies than groundbreaking ones. **Ian Berriman**

ALAMY (1)



"I don't follow the rules!" she said, fastening her seatbelt.

DASHCAM

Driving Miss Crazy



▶ **RELEASED** 6 JUNE

2022 | 15 | Download

Also in selected cinemas from 3 June

▶ Director **Rob Savage**

▶ Cast **Annie Hardy, Amar Chadha-Patel, Angela Enahoro, Mogali Masuku**

➔ **Rob Savage's follow-up to the** terrifying virtual seance in *Host* is another pandemic-specific story.

Musician Annie Hardy of indie band Giant Drag plays a fictional version of herself, who packs up her MAGA hat and live-streams a trip to England to escape Covid restrictions in the US, as she views the virus as a hoax.

She goes to stay with her old friend Stretch (Amar Chadha-Patel), breaking into his home in the middle of the night and announcing herself by spitting in his face and slapping him awake, before stealing his car.

The spectacular unlikeability of *Dashcam's* chaotic protagonist is both the film's greatest weakness and its main strength. Annie is endlessly intriguing, smart but with some ill-conceived views, cruel but frequently hilarious. However, her presence hints at a powerful satirical statement that is unsatisfyingly explored.

After Annie comes across what she thinks is a harmless old woman (a bone-chilling Angela Enahoro) her night of terrors kicks into gear, and Savage's mastery of the genre becomes evident. There are plenty of brutal and disgusting scares, but the streaming framework around them feels gimmicky. Savage ultimately never reaches the high bar he previously set for himself. **Leila Latif**

i The inspiration for *Dashcam* came from Annie Hardy's real life show *Band Car*, where she improvises music from her car.

STINGRAY

Troy Story



EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

1964 | U | Blu-ray

▶ Creators **Gerry and Sylvia Anderson**

▶ Cast **Don Mason, Ray Barrett, Robert Easton, Lois Maxwell**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Nothing in *Stingray***

ever quite tops its insanely adrenalinised opening titles: that frenzy of tribal drums, those exploding oil rigs, that crash-zoom into Commander Shore declaring "Anything can happen in the next half-hour!"

These 39 episodes – the first UK TV series to be filmed entirely in colour – certainly display Gerry Anderson's increasingly widescreen ambitions. Pitting the forces of WASP against everything from ghost pirates to Nessie, it's not just a stepping stone to *Thunderbirds* but a series bursting with a charm all its own, a mix of

maritime whimsy and spectacle showcased to best effect in this newly remastered release.

➔ **Extras** A new retrospective documentary (40 minutes) benefits from archival interviews with lesser-heard creatives, such as director Alan Pattillo, as well as the Andersons. Sylvia Anderson is also represented by an enjoyably candid, career-spanning interview from 2009 (38 minutes). There's also a compilation of black-and-white footage released for home projectors (67 minutes), and a gallery of images from the Chad Valley Give-A-Show Projector.

"The Reunion Party" (30 minutes) is a clips-based "40th episode" made for BBC Four in 2007 which uses linking material for a presentation to Japanese TV execs; that's also presented separately. A fun presentation on *Stingray* tech is hosted by Gordon

When "wooden acting" is just stating a fact.



Tracy (seven minutes). Carried over from previous releases are Gerry Anderson commentaries on the pilot and "Stand By For Action"; a *Stingray*-themed comedy sketch (one minute); a '60s toy ad; and French closing titles. Plus: original ad bumpers; image gallery.

This deluxe edition is packaged with a 305-page book by telly

historian Andrew Pixley; a new *Stingray* comic; a CD of *Terror Fake*, a recording of a story from a *Stingray* annual; and a replica WASP pilot licence and badge. Purchasers will also receive a disc containing two '80s compilation films at a later date. **Nick Setchfield**

i The face of puppet Troy Tempest was inspired by James Garner, then best known for starring in TV Western *Maverick*.



THE PHANTOM EMPIRE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1935 | PG | DVD

▶ Directors Otto Brower,

B Reeves Eason

▶ Cast Gene Autry, Frankie Darro,

Betsy King Ross, Dorothy Christy

➔ As 2011's *Cowboys & Aliens* proved, the SF and Western genres are uneasy partners. Maybe it's because Westerns have traditionally reached for a kind of homespun American authenticity; sweat and trail dust don't blend that naturally with chrome and lasers.

Volume five in Renown's Saturday Morning Pictures range offers an early example, a 12-part serial that plunges crooning cowpoke Gene Autry into the realm of the fantastic, where a secret, technologically-advanced civilisation lurks beneath the sagebrush.

There's clear inspiration from Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* newspaper strip, complete with scheming monarchs, disintegrator rays and labs fizzing with voltage. Shots of a gleaming Art Deco cityscape – "The Scientific City of Muriana" – also nod to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.

Despite pacy editing and the appealingly offbeat premise, it's plucky but pedestrian stuff, an endless cycle of peril-and-rescue undercut by flagrant cheating in the cliffhangers. It doesn't quite work as either SF or a Western. Autry was a huge star but makes for a bland leading man, despite his penchant for yodeling. You suspect the Magnificent Seven would have booted him out for being too milk 'n' cookies.

➔ **Extras** None. **Nick Setchfield**



In space, no one can hear you get eaten by nanobots.

MOONFALL

Rock Follies

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2022 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Roland Emmerich

▶ Cast Patrick Wilson, Halle Berry,

John Bradley, Michael Peña

➔ From its title down, *Moonfall* is a movie in thrall to the gravity of its own preposterous premise: Earth's satellite has abruptly shifted its orbit, spelling certain doom for all below. It's a characteristically apocalyptic set-up for director Roland Emmerich. Cue "Mounting Moon Terror", as chattering media feeds call it: urban riots, mass panic, looting. Worst of all, it's trending on Twitter.

But there's something distinctly half-hearted about Emmerich's latest serving of disaster porn. Glimpsed in news footage, this societal collapse feels incidental, disconnected from the main narrative. Sequences of cities

“Awkward mix of knowing kitsch and earnest emotion”

blitzed by the forces of nature play as equally perfunctory, with a synthetic digital sheen that distances the viewer from the physical truth of the calamity.

Emmerich's more interested in exploring one of the wilder conspiracy theories: the Moon is a "megastructure", a hollow, artificial object placed in Earth's orbit by an unknown intelligence. It's an argument pushed by John Bradley's nerdy blogger, drafted alongside Halle Berry's flinty boffin and Patrick Wilson's washed-up astronaut on a mission to the Moon itself.

Fleeting the movie rides a bizarre, gonzo energy – shots of a looming, skull-like lunar surface are wonderfully sinister – but this awkward mix of knowing kitsch and earnest, heart-on-sleeve emotion ultimately craters.

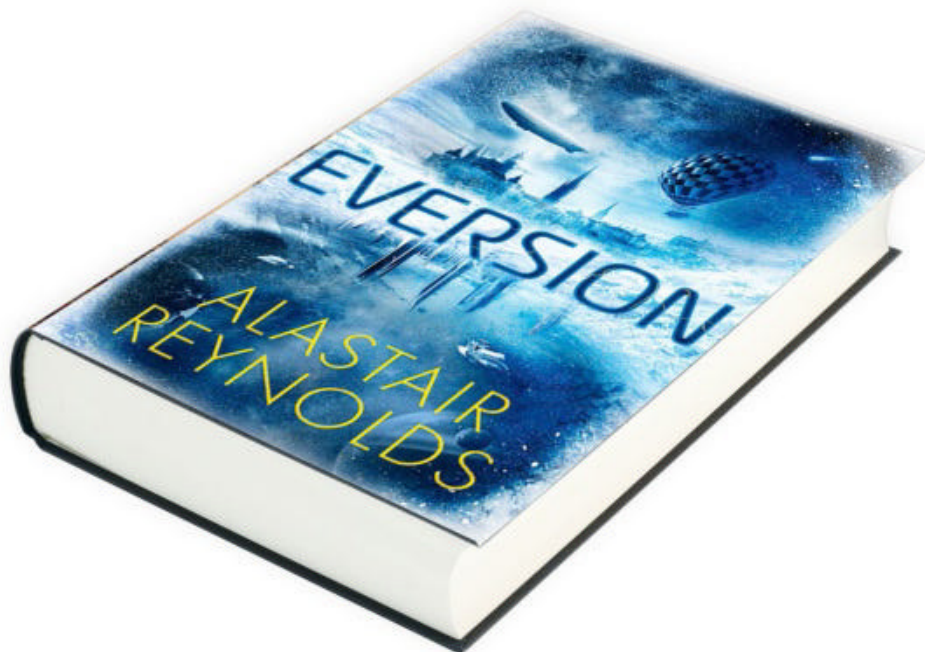
➔ **Extras** In the US, they got commentary by Emmerich and a co-writer, a Making Of, featurettes on the Moon and sound design, and viral videos by Bradley's blogger. We get: not a solitary sausage. **Nick Setchfield**

i Look out for some wallpaper like the carpet in *The Shining* – a nod to the theory that Kubrick helped to fake Apollo 11?

(ROUND UP)



Tom Holland and Mark Wahlberg search for the lost gold of Ferdinand Magellan in videogame adaptation **UNCHARTED** (out now, 4K/Blu-ray/DVD). Bonuses include director's commentary, five featurettes, and deleted scenes. We said: "A disappointingly straightforward cat-and-mouse chase, which brushes aside the games' more supernatural elements in favour of listless puzzle-solving and globetrotting." While set on a 35-day journey to Mars, **MOONSHOT** (out now, download) otherwise conforms to romcom conventions, as in classic screwball comedy style, rich swot Sophie and bumbling romantic Walt fake a relationship which grows into something real after he stows away on a shuttle. It's fluffy, cookie-cutter stuff, with a blandly glossy vision of the future and a few decent one-liners. There are no doomed Arctic mariners in **THE TERROR SEASON TWO** (23 May, Blu-ray/DVD/download), as the second run centres on an internment camp for Japanese-Americans, where a shape-shifting vengeful spirit is causing deaths. We said: "The horror set-pieces are creepy rather than Grand Guignol... This time there's a more familiar whiff of broad-strokes TV drama". Skint? It's currently airing on BBC Two on Fridays, in double-bills, so head to iPlayer. Finally, the latest 4K releases include the original **CANDYMAN** (23 May), and Ultimate Collector's Edition Steelbooks of the Tim Burton (6 June) and Christopher Nolan (30 May) Bat-movies, each bundled with five lobby cards, five art cards and a double-sided poster.



EVERSION

Inside-out science fiction



► **RELEASED 26 MAY**
320 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook
► Author **Alastair Reynolds**
► Publisher **Gollancz**

◉ **There are good reasons why** Alastair Reynolds has a reputation for crafting big science fiction. His debut novel *Revelation Space* (2000) redefined widescreen baroque at the turn of the millennium by upping the baroque and imbuing space opera with a flesh-tingling sense of creepiness. In subsequent years, ranging across different fictional universes, Reynolds has continued to offer up fiction replete with epic plots and exotic settings.

What's less often noticed is that Reynolds doesn't just do widescreen. Throughout his career, he has also written shorter fiction, work where he focuses in on specific ideas and scenarios. We mention this because *Eversion* may well strike fans of Reynolds the space opera guy as a novel of uncharacteristic brevity. Moreover, it's a book whose storytelling essentially spirals inwards rather than ranges across deep space. This is because, similarly to a Christopher Nolan movie, it keeps returning to the

same central story, retelling it from a slightly different angle and nudging the plot along each time.

At its centre lies Dr Silas Coad, a doctor whom we first meet aboard a sailing ship, *Demeter*, off Norway in the 19th century. From Coad's perspective, he's part of a crew on an expedition to find something called "The Edifice". But as his ship runs into trouble, the story shifts. Abruptly, Coad is instead aboard a steamship off Patagonia. Later, we're in a steampunk-tinged timeline aboard an airship. In each storyline, Coad and his fellow adventurers come across a wreck, the *Europa*, but not its crew, and a warning of trouble ahead.

As readers, we're not being told all we need to know to understand what's really happening, and that's of course the point. This may not be widescreen fiction, but it's certainly baroque in that, with each setting, things only get weirder. And that's before we've even begun to discuss the animated spacesuit occupied by a corpse. It's a book as creepy in its way as Reynolds's study of obsession, the 2003 novella *Diamond Dogs*.

Without giving away too many spoilers – and lest there be any

doubt, this is most definitely an SF novel – Coad is someone building fictional worlds because his own situation is terrifying. In each timeline, he encounters the same characters as he tries to process what is happening, notably a woman, Ada Cossile, to whom he is drawn despite her habit of bluntly telling him home truths. These home truths include critiquing a novel Coad is writing, further emphasising the notion of stories within stories.

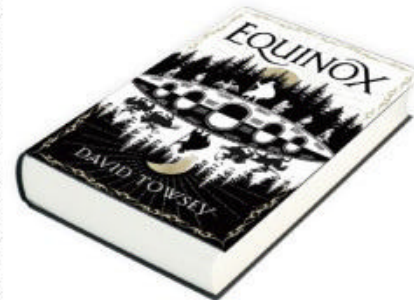
It's only in the final 75 pages or so that we really find out what's going on, and you suspect that a few readers may wander off before they get to this point. Stick with *Eversion*, though, and it's worth the wait, as we're guided inwards towards a larger story that's in the end as much a meditation on what it means to be human – or perhaps to be a person.

If the idea of being guided inwards towards a larger story seems paradoxical, it's actually a design feature of a book that is also concerned with the notion of veridical paradoxes; things that seem initially to be absurd, unbelievable, and yet can be shown to be true.

“It's only in the final 75 pages that we find out what's going on”

To return to where we began, Reynolds's shorter fiction is often where he tries new approaches, explores ideas that might be lost against a vast backdrop of stars were they to be included in a space opera. *Eversion* is a novel that's structurally experimental, and at points is confusing and even irritating, and yet which lands quite beautifully as its central story concludes – riffing off Victorian adventure novels, adding some wholly appropriate sentimentality as it does so. Only a science fiction novelist at the height of his powers could have written this. **Jonathan Wright**

i Sphere eversion – which the title refers to – is the mathematical process of smoothly turning a sphere inside out.



EQUINOX



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

336 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **David Towsey**

► Publisher **Head of Zeus**

◉ **The difference between the** two protagonists of David Towsey's latest novel is – quite literally – night and day.

It's 1721, and something wicked is at work in the Kingdom of Reikova. Christophor Morden is an investigator and witch hunter for the crown, despatched to remote Drekenford to discover the truth about some dark magic and – hopefully – prevent a war. His brother, easy-going musician Aleksander, is along for the ride too, whether he likes it or not. That's because they share the same body; everyone in Reikova has a “brother” or “sister” personality who takes over while the other one sleeps.

It's a fascinating concept and one that Towsey explores skilfully while filling out the rules and history of his world. Christophor and Aleksander make for a unique partnership, but their very different personalities and priorities means that the investigation is far from plain sailing – especially when Aleksander gets emotionally tangled up with someone connected to the mystery.

Equinox is frequently pretty strong stuff. It starts with a man growing teeth in his eye-sockets and darkens from there, often feeling as much supernatural horror as fantasy. Refreshingly, it's a standalone novel rather than the start of a trilogy or series. Ironically, Towsey has hit upon a setting that's ripe for further exploration. **Will Salmon**



THE COLLARBOUND



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author **Rebecca Zahabi**

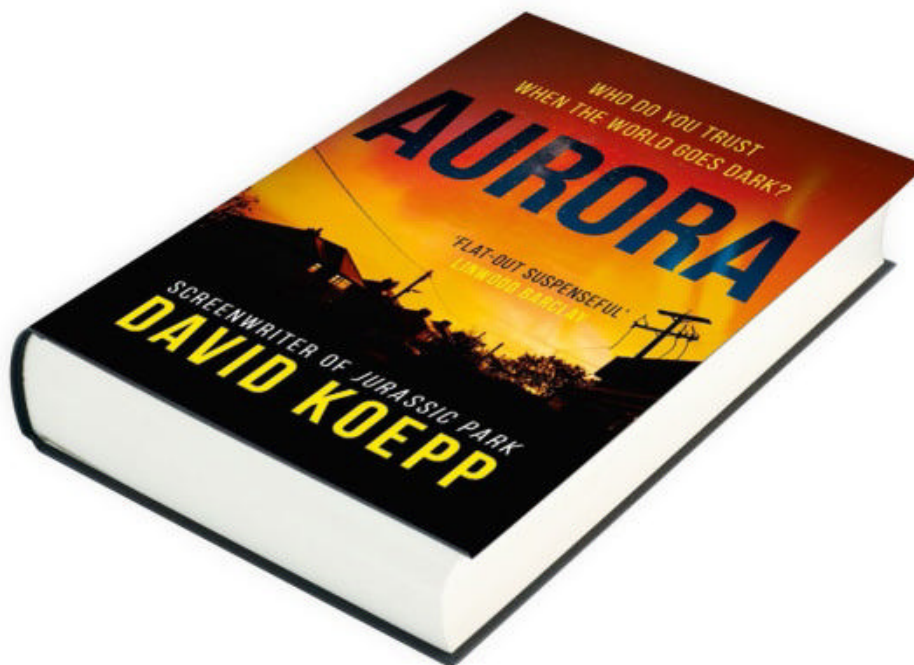
► Publisher **Gollancz**

🔔 **This is Rebecca Zahabi's** first adult novel after 2020's YA hit *The Game Weavers*. *The Collarbound* has a whiff of YA about it still: young Isha arrives at mage school, meets a couple of cute guys and gets caught between warring factions. Singled out by an unusual tattoo on her face, she'll be pivotal in the coming conflict. It's a story of identity and community as well as sorcery and rebellion.

The universe is described in rich detail. It's the literal edge of the world, where water plunges off a cliff down to underworlds below, and ascended beings dance in the sky like aurorae.

But for all its vivid texture, it feels like a patchwork of familiar tropes. The horned Kher people and the Lacunants, drained former mages, are reminiscent of the Qunari and Tranquil from videogame *Dragon Age*. Mindbrawl is a magical take on *The Matrix*. The world-dividing Shadowpass echoes *Shadow & Bone*. Still, that's no crime, and indeed it's a relief to read fantasy drawing on sources other than JRR Tolkien and George RR Martin.

Unfortunately, the prose's lyricism is tarnished by a need to over-explain what characters are doing and thinking. The story gains pace near the end; while that bodes well for part two, this is a rather slow, if charming, start. **Dave Bradley**



AURORA

Ejectile dysfunction



► **RELEASED 9 JUNE**

400 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **David Koepp**

► Publisher **HQ**

🔔 **Hello and welcome to (cue** Skeeter Davis wailing, "Don't they know it's the end of the world...?" and a gaudy logo:) "APOCALYPSE OF THE MONTH!" Strangely, for a book that features two parallel storylines on a collision course, the world-shattering event isn't a giant asteroid crashing into Earth this time but a CME, or Coronal Mass Ejection.

The Sun belches out these electromagnetic eruptions all the time, but roughly every 150 years it produces an almighty belch that collides with the Earth. For most of human history this wasn't a problem. Then we became reliant on electricity. Now, a major CME – or Carrington Event – could knock out electrical systems worldwide for an extended period. On the upside, we'll get some really pretty, Northern Lights-style skies.

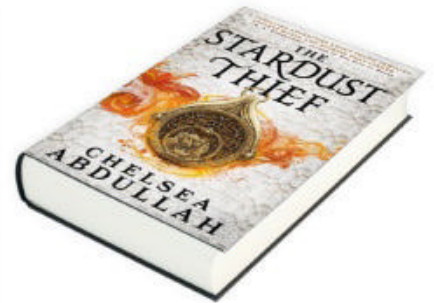
We're currently overdue a Carrington Event, so *Jurassic Park* scriptwriter Koepp uses that as the starting point for his second novel *Aurora*. But after a few science-heavy, I've-done-my-research-and-I'm-gonna-use-it

opening chapters he seems to lose interest in exploring the nitty gritty of a global electricity cut, using it more as a backdrop for a survivalist fable that – with minor alterations – could happen against the backdrop of any apocalypse.

The book follows the stories of estranged siblings Audrey and Thom. He's a super-rich tech guru who's rigorously planned for a CME; she's a working mum in small-town Illinois, divorced from her abusive husband. When the CME hits, Thom retreats to his self-contained underground bunker with a coterie of hand-picked experts; Audrey just gets on and deals with things as they come, organising the neighbourhood into tenant farmers. When Thom's plans start falling apart they're forced into a dramatic reunion.

Throw in a Stephen King-style melodramatic family backstory and some compelling prose and you've got a book that's never less than entertaining. But it's also a tad meandering, light on world-building detail, and its message about how societies function is not exactly new or deep. Read it by candlelight for an authentic experience. **Dave Golder**

i In the acknowledgements, Koepp thanks the residents of his street for lockdown community-spirit inspiration.



THE STARDUST THIEF



► **RELEASED 19 MAY**

468 pages | Hardback/ebook/
audiobook

► Author **Chelsea Abdullah**

► Publisher **Orbit Books**

🔔 **Forget Disney's Aladdin,** in this opening salvo of The Sandsea Trilogy, Chelsea Abdullah breathes new life into the quest for a magic lamp, creating a memorable cast and vivid desert landscapes.

The heroine of the tale is Loulie, the Midnight Merchant, who collects magical relics to sell with the aid of her best friend and bodyguard, a jinn called Qadir. Loulie cherishes her independence, and so bristles when ordered by the Sultan to retrieve a fabled lamp said to contain the most powerful jinn. The Sultan's sons are a study in opposites; the brash Prince Omar leads the Forty Thieves, who hunt jinn that prey upon humans, yet it's his bookish younger brother Mazen who finds himself accompanying Loulie on her mission.

The voyage proves perilous as the adventurers face roving bands of ghouls, bandits, and the mysterious Queen of the Dunes, yet the intensity of the fights and daring escapes is matched by the richness of the characters' inner journeys. Loulie and Mazen confront hidden, painful truths about their pasts as they draw closer to their goal.

The final battle is a little cluttered in execution, but the sun-baked sands of Abdullah's imagination teem with colour, danger and excitement. Terrific. **David West**

SPACE: 1999 – THE VAULT

The Whole Of The Moon

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** 27 MAY
225 pages pages | Hardback
► Author **Chris Bentley**
► Publisher **Signum Books**

► **Fans of Gerry Anderson's** live-action shows have been spoiled of late, with a collection of UFO strips from *Countdown* and a *Moonbase Alpha Operations Manual*. This latest book about the '70s series set on a Moon sent hurtling out of the solar system is the third cracker in a row.

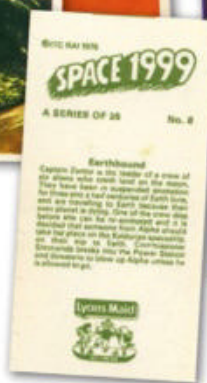
Handsomely illustrated and meticulously researched (to a mindboggling degree), it covers every aspect of the making, marketing and merchandising of the show, from early development under the title *Menace In Space* to the production of ice lollies, bubblegum cards and Dinky toys. The detail can get a tad dry when discussing, say, the typefaces used,

but this is forgivable when there's so much eye candy to enjoy, including matte paintings, publicity brochures and photos of original props.

Two-page breakdowns for every episode catalogue reworked scripts and cut scenes, and go deep dive trivia-wise. A particular delight is a recurring effort to identify recycled props. Did you know that a drill in one episode was actually a Kenwood hand whisk? Well, here's one they've photographed. Chris Bentley's paperwork scouring also reveals that, for example, Dave Prowse started work as a robotic monster four days after finishing *Star Wars*.

The result is a *Space: 1999* book it's difficult to imagine anyone topping – surely the ultimate work on the series. **Ian Berriman**

i Derek Wadsworth, composer of the series two theme, also did the Flake jingle: "Only the crumbliest, flakiest chocolate..."

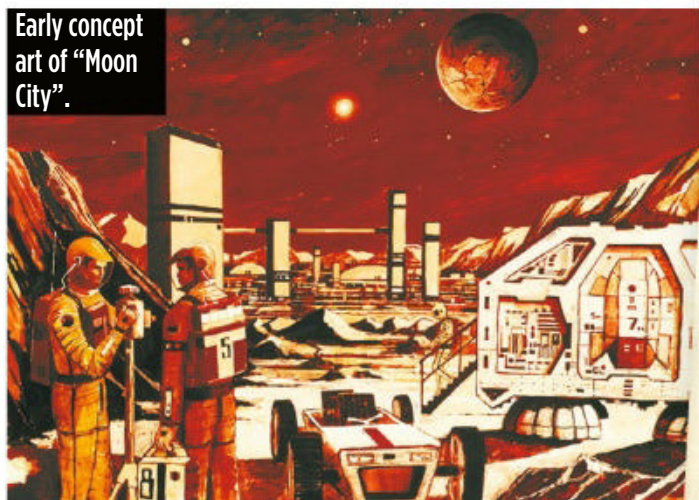


Lyons Maid's ice lollies cost 7p each! Yum.



Three of MEGO's very sexy figures.

Early concept art of "Moon City".



A page of original art from Look-In.



FX guys Brian Johnson and Cyril Forster.



Keith Wilson's Control Centre concept art.





THE PHARMACIST

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

368 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **Rachelle Atalla**

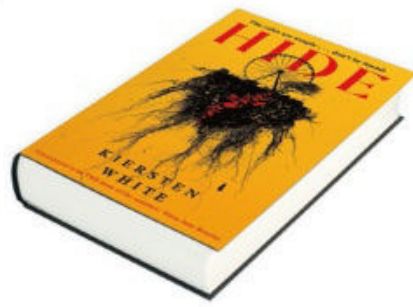
► Publisher **Hodder & Stoughton**

➡ **This is a book about the bunker mentality.** It's low-concept speculative fiction about the survivors of an apocalyptic incident, who have gathered in a large bunker. The details of the incident are loosely sketched; Rachelle Atalla's focus is on the day-to-day reality of living in such a place. It mostly involves eating pureed food, contemplating suicide and watching *Father Of The Bride 2* as a treat.

Initially, Atalla's viewpoint character – Wolfe, a pharmacist whose life was drifting before she came to the bunker – seems peripheral to the drama. But all that changes when a violent incident leads her bunkmate Canavan to ask the community's rarely-seen leader to post a guard on the pharmacy. This leads Wolfe into the leader's orbit; his affable exterior belies his spiralling paranoia, and he asks her to report on her patients.

Atalla lets this tension rise gradually throughout the novel until it becomes almost unbearable, and while it's this element that keeps you reading, the parts that stick in the memory are the keenly observed details: Wolfe's dulled taste buds being overwhelmed by a single pistachio, the bickering and chaos unleashed by a Christmas tree-decorating competition. It's really remarkable how she makes this bland, bleak, limited world so vivid and engrossing.

Eddie Robson



HIDE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 24 MAY**

256 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Kiersten White**

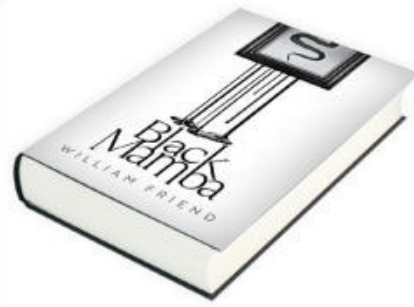
► Publisher **Del Rey**

➡ **"The book you need after *Squid Game*!"** yells the hype for Kiersten White's latest. Well, sort of. In fact this well-written horror novel feels closer to *The Cabin In The Woods* in terms of both its plot and themes.

Mack badly needs money, and so leaps at the chance to enter a hide-and-seek competition with a large cash prize. Fourteen contestants must endure a week in a spooky abandoned amusement park. If they're caught, they're eliminated. Simple. But as the days pass, Mack and the others begin to suspect that something far more sinister is afoot.

White faces a challenge with *Hide*: how to make a thriller where the characters (a curious mix of influencer types and seemingly regular Joes) stay still and silent but remain interesting. She manages it by getting inside their heads and deftly exploring the hopes and fears of these 14 people. We empathise with Mack and potential love interest Ava, but even characters like self-absorbed, untrustworthy Jaden are nicely filled out. The action comes quickly, too, and while it's a little predictable – genre-savvy readers will likely guess the nature of this "game" – the story is legitimately tense and often affecting.

It's a short and easy read, but don't mistake *Hide* for shallow. There's real horror at the heart of the novel and a core of genuine anger beneath the surface. **Will Salmon**



BLACK MAMBA

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 2 JUNE**

320 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **William Friend**

► Publisher **Atlantic Books**

➡ **Kids say creepy things.** If you're a parent, or have friends who are, you probably have stories about the terrifying things little kids come out with. But who'd take any of it seriously?

In William Friend's debut novel, seven-year-old twins Sylvie and Cassia say lots of creepy things. They say there's a man in their room. They say he can transform himself into a snake. And they say that he's going to take them away somewhere they'll never see their father again. Family therapist Julia reckons it's understandable: after all, they lost their mother nine months ago. But their dad, Alfie, feels threatened. Could this "Black Mamba" be more than an imaginary friend?

Despite a dual narrative that switches regularly between Alfie's perspective and Julia's, most of the beats of this novel feel very familiar. With its twins motif, its creaky haunted house and its ambiguously supernatural villain, it's basically got the plot of a lower-tier Blumhouse movie. Reading it, you can almost see the dingy colour grading they'd put on a film adaptation. It's not that the writing is bad, exactly; it's just generic, and neither of the two principals has a particularly distinctive voice.

A subplot promises a bit of extra creep-factor, but it's underdeveloped. Like a kid's post-nightmare terrors, nothing here leaves a really lasting impression. **Sarah Dobbs**

REISSUES

Our pick of the paperbacks this month:

TERMINATION SHOCK

(★★★★, out now, The Borough Press). The big theme of Neal

Stephenson's near-future tale is geoengineering – the possibility of reversing global heating. Could it work, and what might the

consequences be for humanity? We said: "A giddy collision of ideas, action and character types... The

book's strangely paced, but when it does gather momentum, it really flies, with a thrill-filled final 200 pages that you may find yourself reading in a single sitting." **Zeno Cho's**

BLACK WATER SISTER

(★★★★, out now, Pan) is set in Malaysia, and follows Jess, whose

grandmother's voice appears in her head shortly after she dies. Turns out Ah Ma was channelling the violent

god Black Water Sister, a role Jess may now have to step into to protect her family. We said: "Sags

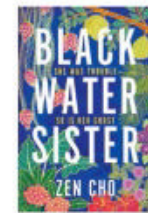
in the middle, with the gangster elements not hitting so well as the ghosts, but in a book that covers misogyny, domestic abuse and the lack of options for women that's a small complaint."

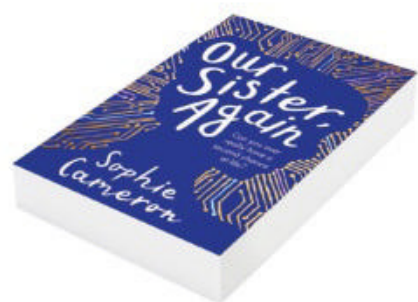
Finally, horror author Christopher Buehlman brings some of the darkness of that genre to his first epic fantasy, **THE BLACKTONGUE THIEF**

(★★★★, out now, Gollancz). Its hero, Kinch,

a cynical thief, is ordered to accompany a knight on her mission to find a missing queen in a land overrun

by invading giants. We said: "Battle scenes are sharp and brutal, but balanced with wit and moments of romance... A rousing fantasy debut."





OUR SISTER, AGAIN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

304 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Sophie Cameron

► Publisher Little Tiger

🔗 **This YA tale exploring life, death and what makes us human is a sophisticated, thought-provoking read.**

Teenager Isla lives on a remote Scottish island and has spent the past couple of years mourning the death of her older sister, Flora, from cancer. But things are about to change: her family have been picked by a megacorp named Second Chances to receive a robot version of Flora – almost identical to the girl they lost, with a personality cobbled together from in-depth interviews with anyone who knew her, plus all the many, many things she posted online.

When Flora arrives – talking, breathing and laughing – she's so like the real thing that it's easy to forget she's fake. She is, though... and some people on the island aren't happy about it.

Much of what's discussed in *Our Sister, Again* has already been thrashed out in countless sci-fi tales, most recently in *Humans*. What helps this particular exploration of the theme is its excellent narrator: Isla is a believable protagonist, asking all the questions we'd ask in the same situation, feeling all the same feelings.

Sophie Cameron skilfully depicts a realistic family dealing with unrealistic events, and makes us fall in love with Flora (old and new). The result is a chewy, sensitive novel with beautifully handled emotional depth. **Jayne Nelson**



STAR WARS: BROTHERHOOD

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

352 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author Mike Chen

► Publisher Del Rey

🔗 **With the *Obi-Wan Kenobi* TV show about to renew hostilities between the titular Jedi and his fallen apprentice, Darth Vader, *Star Wars: Brotherhood* is perfectly timed to look back on happier times in their relationship.**

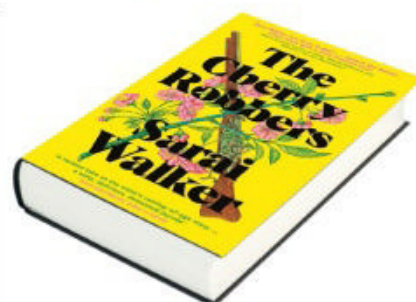
Unsurprisingly, the story isn't short on signs and portents of things to come, yet little feels essential to the wider canon.

Picking up in the immediate aftermath of *Attack Of The Clones*, *Brotherhood* sees Obi-Wan dispatched to investigate a bombing on the Trade Federation homeworld of Cato Neimoidia. The newly knighted Anakin Skywalker, meanwhile, finds himself reluctantly childminding a group of younglings, before a spot of minor insubordination allows the two Jedi's paths to converge.

Over the course of a narrative that falls into the *Phantom Menace* trap of too much politics, not enough action, the book comes tantalisingly close to expanding some major *Star Wars* themes. Before long, however, it's clear that answers to the biggest questions raised are some way above this novel's pay grade.

Mike Chen shows off his *Star Wars* knowledge in numerous nods to the prequels, but it's unlikely this uneventful adventure would have made the cut in the *Clone Wars* TV series.

Richard Edwards



THE CHERRY ROBBERS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 2 JUNE**

432 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Sarai Walker

► Publisher Serpent's Tail

🔗 **A common motif in Gothic novels is that houses aren't haunted, it's the people who inhabit them that are.**

No one feels more haunted than Iris Chapel, a famous artist living under a pseudonym, who's shying away from attention and scrutiny in New Mexico. Until, that is, a mysterious letter one day forces her to look back at her childhood, as the last living daughter of the Chapel gun-manufacturing dynasty. And on the curse that picked off each of her sisters as soon as she had sex.

This example of the modern Gothic is a heated, humid one: a juicy pulp of sisterhood, puberty, desire and first love, all narrated in a hushed, floaty style that builds to a shrill whistle when the sisters meet their fates.

At times it feels oddly superficial. Seasoned horror fans will quickly notice that the Chapels's mother – who receives nightly visitations from the ghosts of people killed by Chapel firearms – is a replica of the real-life Sarah Winchester, widow of gun maker William. Meanwhile the girls are dark-haired mirror images of the Lisbon sisters from *The Virgin Suicides*. It also never feels truly scary, which unfortunately mellows the experience. But there's no denying how long it lingers after the turning of the final page. **Kimberley Ballard**

ALSO OUT

There's plenty more books we couldn't fit in. We're told Margaret Atwood fans should appreciate Kelly Barnhill's feminist fantasy **WHEN WOMEN WERE DRAGONS** (out now, Hot Key). It's set in an alternate '50s America where repressed housewives spontaneously transform into dragons. And a "Mass Dragoning" is coming which will change everything... Suitable for ages 12+, Ann Sei Lin's **REBEL SKIES** (out now, Walker) is inspired by Asian culture and explores themes of empire and slavery. It's set in a world of flying ships and sky cities, where chosen ones have the ability to bring paper to life. "American Gods meets *The Dark Tower*" is the sell for Max Gladstone's latest, **LAST EXIT** (out now, Titan). Blending post-apocalypse, horror and road movie, it centres on a bunch of college friends who learned how to travel to alternate realities using mathematics, and get back together to save the world from a semi-intelligent black rot – just your average Thursday, then. Gillian McAllister's **WRONG PLACE, RIGHT TIME** (out now, Michael Joseph) puts a time travel twist on the crime thriller. A woman's son is arrested for murdering a stranger. Each time she subsequently wakes up, it's a day earlier – another day before the murder. Can she prevent it from happening? Finally, time travel and romance are the themes of **SOMEONE IN TIME** (out now, Solaris).

This new anthology includes 16 tales by the likes of Catherynne M Valente, Zen Cho, Margo Lanagan, Alix E Harrow and Seanan McGuire – 14 of them original to this collection.





Holly Black

The *Spiderwick Chronicles* writer has a kitten named after a *D&D* demon!



What is your daily writing routine like?

▮ I think I've tried it all: outlining, fast drafting, note cards, whiteboard, three-act structure, five-act structure, reading the entrails of goats. But none of it has made the drafting process less agonising! Recently I've tried skeleton drafting and found that useful – at least I can get my mistakes over with quickly and get on to the revising stage, which is where the book starts to feel like something I can fix rather than something I am failing to properly make.

Describe the room in which you typically write.

▮ I write in my office, which has a squashy leather couch, lots and lots of books, and a brand new wall perch for my hairless kitten, Quasit.

Do you find it helpful to listen to music?

▮ One of the ways I procrastinate is to make playlists for my books. You can find several on Spotify, including the one for *Book Of Night*. In particular, with this book, I liked listening to "Giver" by K Flay and Sam Tinnesz's "Play With Fire", both of which seemed quintessentially [lead character] Charlie Hall.

How do you deal with writers' block/the urge to procrastinate?

▮ I see those as very different things. Usually, when I am blocked, it's because I either haven't figured out something to do with the story, or I need to make a big change (usually one I haven't realised yet, or don't have a better idea for). But the urge to procrastinate often comes from anxiety. For that, I've been setting a timer for 15- or 20- or 30-minute sprints, promising myself a break when I am done.

“One of the ways I procrastinate is to make playlists for my books”

Do you have any writing “bad habits” that you have to keep in check?

▮ My first drafts are extremely skeletal, so I need to go back through, and slow things down.

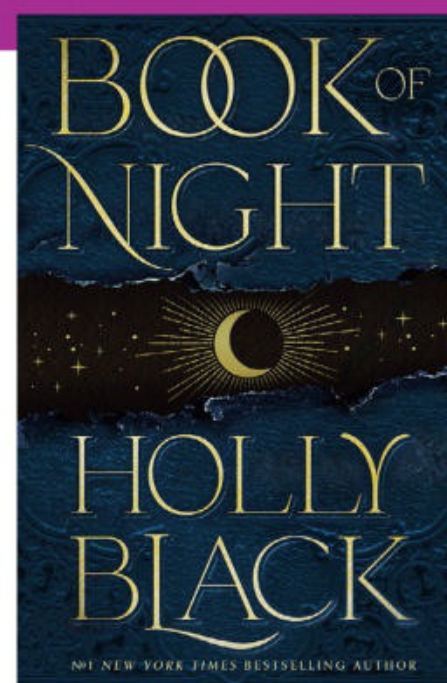
Which of your books was the most difficult to write?

▮ *Book Of Night*! I think I deleted three words for every one word I kept.

Is there any particular author whose writing ability makes you envious?

▮ So many that it is hard to choose. But recently I've been thinking about how I absolutely adore Megan Abbott's work. Her writing, line to line, is evocative, energetic and gorgeous. Plot-wise, she is a writer with a delicious understanding of women's capacity for brutality. I started with her noir books, like *QueenPin* and (my favourite) *Die A Little*, and also love her contemporaries, like *Dare Me* or *The Fever*.

What's the biggest misconception people have



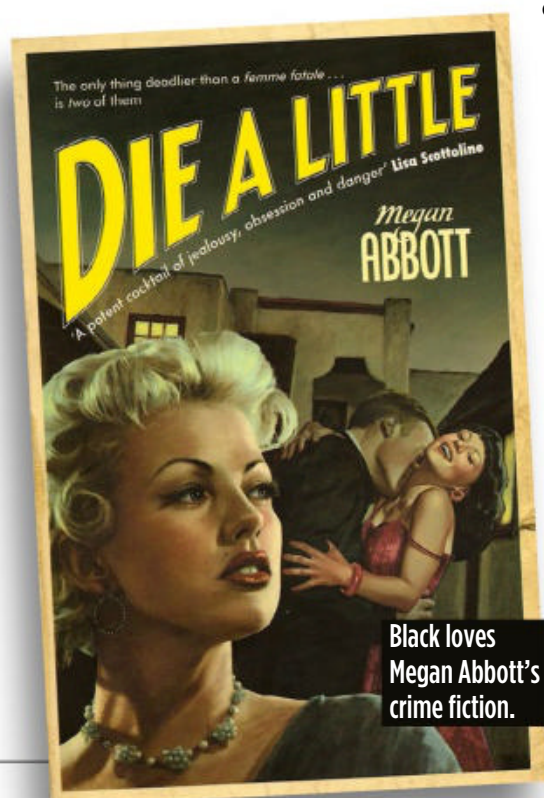
about being a professional author?

▮ That, for us, writing must be easy. Thomas Mann once famously said, “A writer is a person to whom writing is more difficult than to other people”, and I find this to be sadly true.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've received or read?

▮ Write for your reader self and not your writer self. We have a lot of received wisdom about what writing should be like, but when we put that aside and remember what we ourselves enjoy reading, we get at the stories we love.

Holly Black's adult debut Book Of Night is on sale now, published by Del Rey.



Black loves Megan Abbott's crime fiction.

First Read

AN EXTRACT FROM A NEW BOOK

Equinox

by David Towsey

DISCOVER A SPELLBINDING NEW FANTASY SET IN A WORLD
WHERE EACH BODY IS SHARED BY TWO SOULS

In this strange world, where identities change with the rising and setting of the sun, supernatural forces are at work – and they’re causing trouble...

St Leonars prison was an appropriately imposing building. It rose out of the surrounding shacks and huts, solid stone with a singular, unified purpose – one building in the centre of a scattered jigsaw. The walls were easily twenty feet high, and gave the impression they were twenty feet deep. Guard towers stood at each corner of St Leonars’ great square, with mounted muskets pointing both inwards and outwards.

At the entrance, night-releases were still coming out. They looked tired, beaten, and those that met my eye recognised the same when they saw it. They knew what I was.

In its way, despite the walls and guards and muskets, St Leonars prison was entirely escapable. The night-brothers and sisters of those incarcerated were, before my very eyes, walking out of prison. There were those relatively rare people who were convicted criminals day and night, both sides of the etienne. But the rest were released at either sunrise or sunset when the change occurred. They willingly returned just the same because the King’s Justice *wasn’t* escapable: the King couldn’t hang just one brother or sister. Hanged at night was still dead come sunrise, and vice versa.

I presented the summons at the gates,

“There was something else where there should have been eyes, just as the warden had said... A white pip lurking”

where it was read. And read again.

“Bad business,” one guard muttered, showing the utterly functional script to his partner.

“Excuse me?” I said.

“The warden’s in her office, Inspector.” He waved me through the main gates. He smelled of cooked cabbage and pipe smoke.

I knew the way well enough, through long straight corridors with bars every twenty paces. My summons garnered unfathomable looks of sympathy, at the last of which I snatched the envelope back and demanded the man hurry up. He just shook his head and let me through. All these gateways and checks seemed unnecessary for an administrative wing, but I supposed the warden knew what she was about. She had been there long enough, day and night.

She didn’t look up as I entered her office. I waited as she squinted at letters an inch tall, in a room with more candles than a cathedral. Stacks of papers took up every available surface, including the floor, where there was an obvious path that made me feel like a soaring bird looking down on a mountain road.

“Special Inspector Morden,” she said. She carefully signed whatever she was reading, then sat back and took my measure. I shifted, as cattle shift under the butcher’s gaze. “How’s Alexsander?”

I shrugged. “Busy, I think.”

“That’s good.”

The Author



→ David Towsey is a graduate of the Creative Writing programmes at Bath Spa University and Aberystwyth University. Born in Dorset, he now lives in Cardiff with his girlfriend and their growing boardgame collection. Together, they write under the pseudonym of D.K. Fields, whose *Tales Of Fenest* trilogy is also published by Head of Zeus. David’s first novel, *Your Brother’s Blood*, was published by Quercus, and was the first in the *Walkin’ Trilogy*. He’s also one half of indie games company Pill Bug Interactive, who have released three titles across PC and Nintendo Switch.

“Are you going to tell me why I’m here?” I said, trying to keep my voice even.

“You’re here for the same reason I’m here: because you were told to be.”

“And tonight?”

“That’s not so good,” she said softly. She stood, her aches and pains as evident and heavy as the keys around her neck.

I followed her down and down again, deeper into St Leonars than I had ever been before. Despite the warden’s presence, the guards at each gate made no effort to hide their pity.

A narrow staircase led us finally down to a damp, dark corridor. The walls and floor were formed of large, sweating stones, and the ceiling was low enough to force me to hunch uncomfortably. This felt like an older part of St Leonars – a building I’d always assumed had sprung into existence all at once, at the beginning of time when God created man, woman, and prison. There was an unexpected quiet as we passed door after door. Just as I was beginning to think the cells were empty, the warden stopped.

She started to speak, but caught herself. She came to some kind of decision, wincing at her own noise as she whispered, “See it first. Then

I’ll explain what I can.”

I glanced at the iron-studded door. The boards had warped considerably and beads of water ran down their uneven surface.

“What–”

The warden took a key from around her

neck and, with a rhythm of clunks that sounded like the tolling of a mourning bell, unlocked the cell door.

The room was utterly black. I took a step back.

"We removed the candle. It only seemed fair," the warden said.

I waited a moment, and my eyes adjusted enough to make out a figure huddled in the far corner.

I said something to the prisoner. Words that must have been comforting

in both their sound and their meaning, but I wasn't really aware of either.

He started to sob, which silenced me. I felt a gap between us, then, yawning up like a chasm.

This boy, no more than sixteen years old with a life yet to be lived, and I... a man with little left. But what separated us was more than simple time, the chasm was a depth of suffering. The boy had suffered more than I ever could. I nearly turned and fled.

Instead, I felt compelled to step further into the room. The light from the corridor gave the young man shape: short hair, cut back like most prisoners; a thin, prominent nose; and holes where there should have been eyes.

He trembled violently.

Crouching, I cleared my throat and said, "Hello?"

He flinched and tried to bury himself further into the corner of the room, but St Leonars' stone offered only resistance.

"He's become mute," the warden said. I glanced back to see her haloed in candlelight.

"Tongue's still there, mind."

In another situation I may have been shocked by her casual delivery, but I had little shock left. I turned back to the boy, who wore a rough-looking smock but no shoes. He smelled faintly of lavender. "Can you hear me? Do you understand?"

He continued his struggle to put a distance between us. I waited for him to calm himself, but eventually it became obvious I would only be a continuous source of agitation. I stood to leave.

"Inside the sockets," the warden said. "You need to... You should see."

I could tell nothing from the warden's expression, except that there was no room for argument. Tentatively, I stepped towards the boy as I would a

dangerous animal; I felt shame at that thought, but it was there nonetheless. He was shaking his head with such force, his scalp ground against the stone wall and filled the cell with the smell of blood.

There was something else where there should have been eyes, just as the warden had said. A white pip lurking in each of those pools of darkness. Drawing closer, I took them to be bone – perhaps the boy had shattered a bone in his face and that had ruined his eyes. With such poor light it was hard to be certain and I found myself inexplicably reaching out a finger. My hand, my whole arm shook. As if sensing my intent and giving what permission he could, the boy stilled.

I touched the hard white pip, feeling a slight serrated edge. I withdrew quickly, hurried out of the room, and slammed the cell door shut.

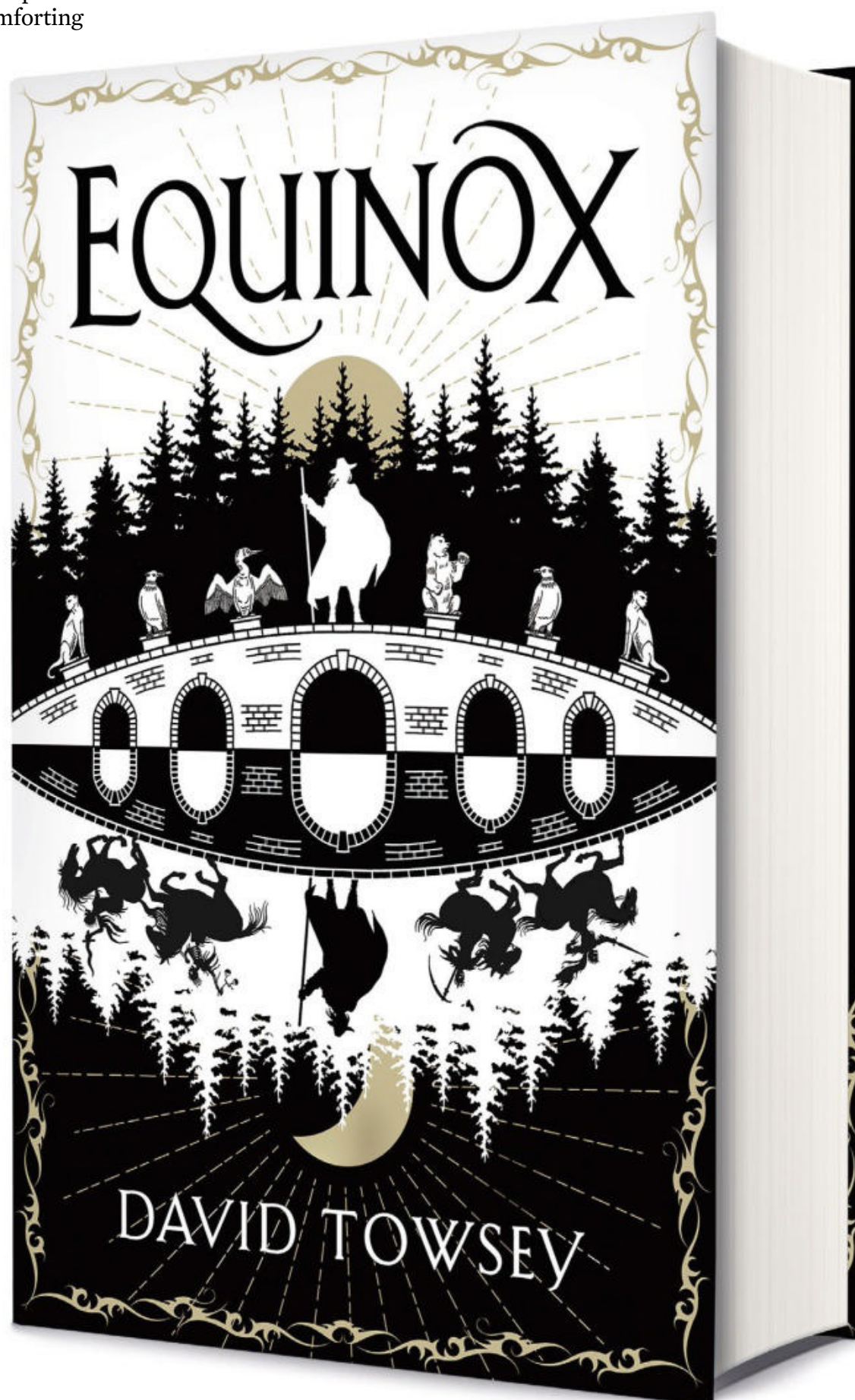
"Teeth?" I said, incredulous, but the warden was nodding before I even finished.

"Likely the cause of it; the pain becoming too much."

"I'm sorry?" I said.

"The teeth. That's why he tore his own eyes out."

Can Christophor find who is responsible for this evil deed? Find out in Equinox, available now at all good bookshops.



SHE-HULK

It Isn't Easy Being Green



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel Comics**

► Writer **Rainbow Rowell**

► Artists **Rogê Antônio**

ISSUES 1-3 Sometimes, a comics publisher hitting the “superhero reset” button is perfectly understandable. Take the case of Jennifer Walters, aka She-Hulk: she’s spent the last few years undergoing a tortuous and sometimes traumatic series of melodramatic twists, but there’s also a Disney+ series coming later this year.

To prepare the ground for this, Marvel has chosen to get back to basics and establish an easy jumping-on point for the character with a new five-issue miniseries.

Writer Rainbow Rowell quickly sketches out how down-on-her-

luck Jennifer Walters currently is, with her recent departure from the Avengers meaning that she has to return to working as a lawyer. Jen ends up getting a low-level position with an old boss of hers just to get by, and things get even more complicated when supposedly dead ex-Avenger Jack of Hearts stumbles back into her life... But while these first three issues set up intriguing threads, the story doesn’t seem in any hurry to resolve them.

Instead, Rowell’s script focuses more on characterisation and humour, and some of her choices work very well, especially in terms of establishing Jen as an engaging protagonist. This is also helped by the enjoyable visuals from Rogê Antônio, who gives us a version of She-Hulk that’s vibrant, characterful and sexy, while also

packing maximum expressiveness into each page, whether it’s a conversation or a fight scene.

The tone is light and accessible, the art is colourful and fun – but there are also elements that feel a little off. While this miniseries is obviously aimed as a potential tester for an ongoing title (as previously happened with 2020’s successful *Shang-Chi* miniseries), it seems exceptionally weird that She-Hulk isn’t the main focus of the story. Instead, too much of the narrative revolves around the lesser-known Jack of Hearts (especially in issue two) and his mystery resurrection. As a narrative hook it ends up feeling less than compelling, and

“It seems exceptionally weird that She-Hulk isn’t the main focus of the story”

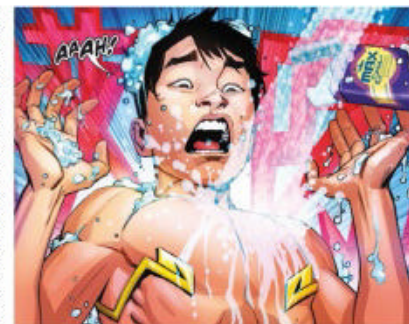
Jennifer’s relationship with Jack isn’t really strong enough to justify how much space it’s currently taking up.

Combined with the *extremely* gentle pacing, the result feels too much like a place-setting opening arc for an ongoing title, rather than a five-parter that’s got something to prove. It also doesn’t help that the 2014 run of *She-Hulk* did the “superhero lawyer” idea much better, leaving this 2022 version feeling like it’s running to catch up.

There’s still light and frothy fun to be had with this current incarnation of She-Hulk, though; here’s hoping that the final two issues deliver something a little more focused and compulsive.

Saxon Bullock

i Marvel created *She-Hulk* in 1980 to preempt the *Incredible Hulk* TV show getting the rights to a female Hulk.



MONKEY PRINCE



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Gene Luen Yang**

► Artist **Bernard Chang**

ISSUES 1-3 DC’s occasional habit of making blatant plays for the Chinese audience is in evidence again with its latest miniseries, an oddball escapade in which mythological characters cross paths with DC superheroes.

The centuries-old Chinese fantasy epic *Journey To The West* has been adapted countless times, and here it’s used as the springboard for the adventures of Marcus, a nervous, bullied Gotham teenager who suddenly discovers he’s the son of the legendary Monkey King and heir to his anarchic abilities.

Soon, he’s renaming himself the Monkey Prince, facing off against his bullies and accidentally battling Batman, while also confronting a demon-possessed Penguin in an all-ages adventure that does its best to keep the pace high and the gags numerous.

There’s an infectious level of energy and enthusiasm in the first three issues, although the storytelling is very routine once you look past the mythic weirdness. However, the comic’s bright, upbeat approach is enhanced by Bernard Chang’s art, which pulls off a bunch of striking layouts and keeps the tone whimsical and cartoony at all times.

The blend of superhero action and lurid Chinese fantasy is sometimes a little awkward, but otherwise this is a daft and likeable romp that should go down well with younger fans. **Saxon Bullock**



This feels a little on the nose, to be honest.



BLACK BETH: VENGEANCE BE THY NAME

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** 9 JUNE

► Publisher Rebellion

► Writers Unknown, Alec Worley

► Artists Blas Gallego, DaNi,
Andrea Bulgarelli

COLLECTION The original *Black Beth* story is a real anomaly: a swords and sorcery adventure published 12 years after it was completed, in British horror comic *Scream!* For years it was unclear who was behind it, and while it's now known that Blas Gallego drew the strip, the identity of the writer remains unknown. This slim volume collects her adventures to date – that first tale and four recent follow-ups.

Beth is a young woman who survives a raid on her village by the despotic Lord Rassau. Nursed back to health by blind dwarf Quido, she sets out to lead a peasants' revolt against the tyrant, cutting down anyone foolish enough to get in her way. It's a simple and effective tale, memorably drawn by Gallego, whose scratchy monochrome art is visceral and intricate, rendering Beth as a lethal warrior with something of the gothic heroine about her.

The new stories – “The Magos Of Malice”, “The Witch Tree”, “The Devils of Al-Kadesh” and the short “Fairy Tales” – broaden Beth's world, seeing her tackle sea monsters and evil sorcerers, while adding a layer of ambiguity. Is she a righteous “sword maiden” or just a ruthless mercenary? Either way, this is an atmospheric collection of old-school fantasy. **Will Salmon**



STAR TREK: KLINGONS/FERENGI

Trek without Terrans

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

► Publisher IDW Publishing

► Writers Jackson Lanzig, Colin Kelly,
Christina Rice

► Artists Timothy Green II, Andy Price,
Maria Keane

ONE-SHOTS With any humans limited to fleeting appearances, *Star Trek's* alien species take centre stage in this pair of one-shots. As *Trek's* most famous extraterrestrials, the Klingons are unsurprisingly the focus of the first issue, which chronicles the formative days of the warrior race's most formidable ruler, Kahless the Unforgettable, and how he reputedly fought off an entire army at the legendary Three-Turn Bridge.

Opening with a rare scene of Kahless displaying his more tender side, as he first bests and then befriends a multiple-tusked, boar-like creature, writers Jackson Lanzig and Colin Kelly neatly evoke the spirit of Akira Kurosawa's samurai films as they

play with notions of honour. Keeping dialogue to a minimum, they often leave it to Timothy Green II's manga-flavoured art to tell the tale, resulting in several exhilarating fight scenes, as he combines visceral figure work with imaginative layouts.

In contrast, there's an offbeat, caper-esque quality to the second special's story of the Ferengi, as *Deep Space Nine* barkeep Quark becomes embroiled in a plot to smuggle women off their home-world. Aided by Andy Price and Maria Keane's vibrant artwork, Christina Rice's boisterous script explores one of the more dubious aspects of Ferengi culture: their belief that women not only shouldn't earn money but shouldn't even wear clothes. She handles it deftly, mixing pathos with sly humour. A promising new series, which bring a different perspective to the *Star Trek* universe. **Stephen Jewell**

i Jody Houser and Hendry Prasetya will focus on the Trill in the next one-shot. The Vulcans are also lined up.



ALL-NEW FIREFLY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

► Publisher BOOM! Studios

► Writer David M Booher

► Artist Jordi Pérez

ISSUES 1-3 This relaunch of the monthly *Firefly* comic brings in a new creative team, and returns the series to first principals after the expansive Earth That Was arc.

The crew are all together again (along with newbie Leonard), but things are not going well. Kaylee is captain now and the ship is running dangerously low on food and fuel. Following a tip-off from Jayne, the crew investigate Requiem, a smuggler's moon. When they get there, however, they find a monastery under attack from a dangerous gang of local hoodlums.

Plot-wise, it's standard-issue *Firefly*, but David M Booher's script does a fine job of honing in on what originally made the TV show so memorable: its strong characterisation. Jayne is the focus of this initial arc, and the story probes at both his fundamental untrustworthiness and his occasional, unexpected capacity for kindness. Kaylee, meanwhile, is struggling with leadership, but Booher smartly avoids pitting her against Mal, who seems quite happy to step back and support her. It's a neat shift in dynamics.

Jordi Pérez's lightly stylised art and Francesco Segala and Gloria Martinelli's colours capture the space Western vibe perfectly, bringing a real earthiness to the book. It's a credible continuation of the show, which understands why we fell in love with these characters all those years ago.

Will Salmon

LEGO STAR WARS: THE SKYWALKER SAGA

May the toys be with you



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PlayStation 5

► Also on PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series X|S, PC

► Publisher Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment

VIDEOGAME **Nine movies,** one game, all wrapped up in wholesome Lego goodness. Pick your starting point – you can begin with the first entry in any of the three trilogies – and it's time to Ewok and roll. You might be surprised at how good a *Star Wars* experience has been built here.

Although the huge cast of characters and wide array of

vehicles (all eventually unlockable and playable) are present in toy form, don't be fooled into thinking that the *Star Wars* atmosphere suffers. Not only are the stirring soundtracks and iconic special effects present and correct, but environments have been recreated with an impressive level of accuracy and attention to detail.

If you've played a Lego game before, to a large extent you'll know what to expect. Infinite lives, pleasingly daft humour, destroying everything in your path in order to Hoover up studs (the currency used to purchase new characters), and so on. Multiplayer is still present, too. It only

supports two players, and sadly there's no online option, but it's a great experience to share with a younger gamer (or indeed older).

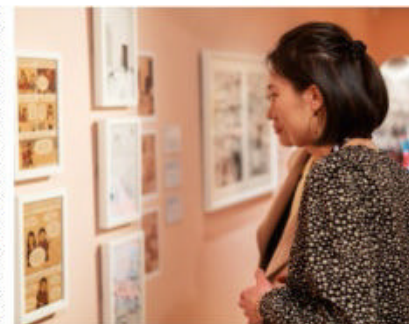
Each movie is represented by five levels, making for a story experience of decent length. Outside of this there's Galaxy Mode, an open-world experience where you're free to jump between Tatooine, Naboo, Dagobah and more in search of secrets and side missions. Here (and in replayed story levels), you can use absolutely any characters that you've unlocked. Kylo Ren working alongside Yaddle?

“Don't be fooled into thinking that the *Star Wars* atmosphere suffers”

Princess Leia and Jabba the Hutt putting aside their differences to stomp Stormtroopers together? Sure, why not.

Part of the appeal of the Lego games is their simplicity, so it's disappointing to see *The Skywalker Saga* introduce multiple skill trees. They don't detract from the experience too much, although it's slightly annoying that decent damage and movement speed are unlocks rather than defaults. Of more concern are the small but noticeable number of bugs present when exploring in Galaxy Mode, although these have a chance of being fixed with future updates. They're certainly not enough to ruin one of the best *Star Wars* games of recent years. **Luke Kemp**

i The game features the final acting credit of Tom Kane (Admiral Ackbar), following his retirement after a stroke.



SUPERHEROES, ORPHANS AND ORIGINS



► **Open until 28 AUGUST**

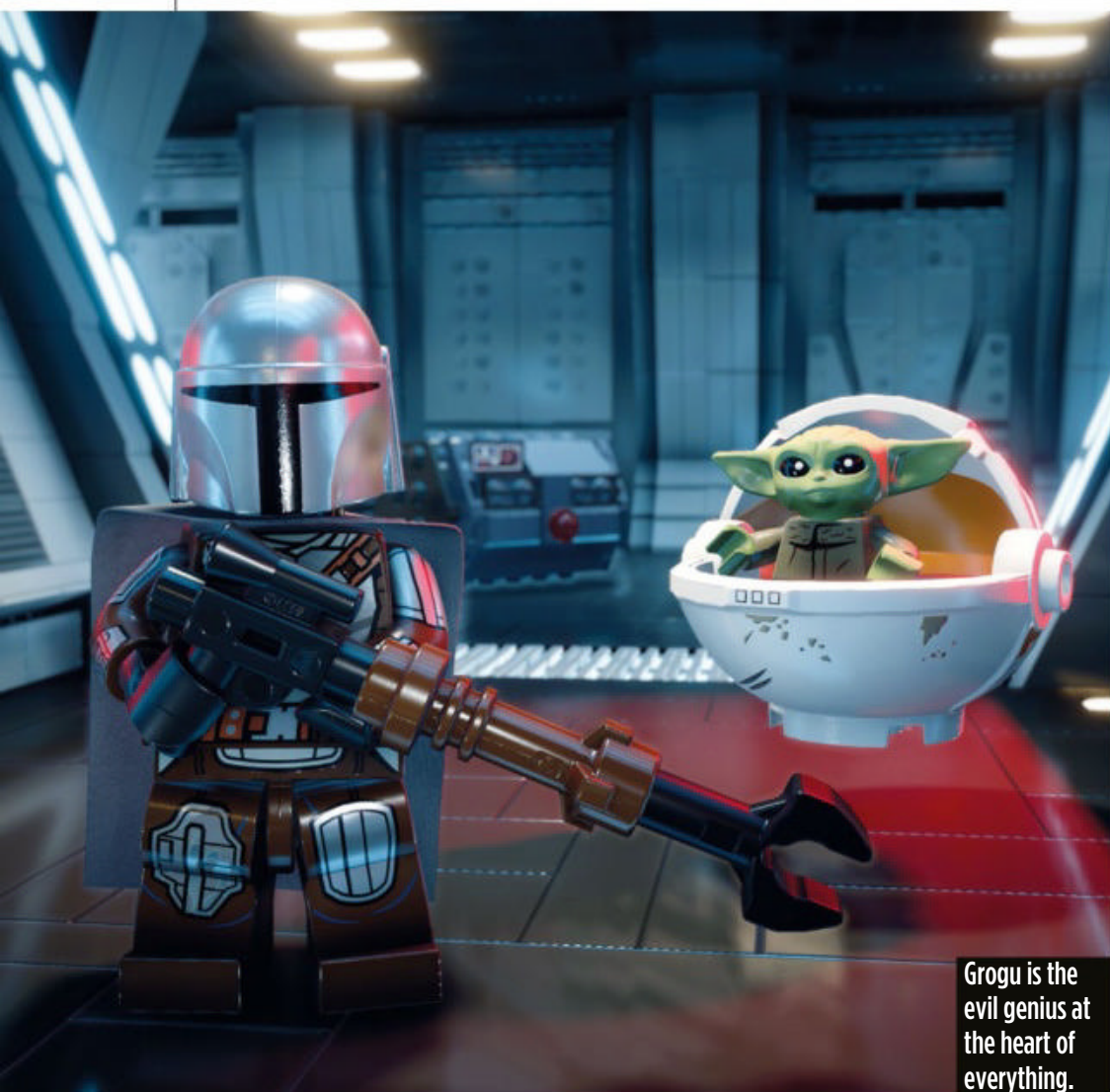
► Venue Foundling Museum, London

EXHIBITION **From Superman to** Batman and Spider-Man, losing parents at an impressionable age has been a common factor for many superheroes, as this fine exhibition explores.

With whole sections devoted to both the Man of Steel and the Caped Crusader, it curiously draws on South African reprints from the '50s and '60s of earlier titles like *World's Finest Comics* and *Detective Comics*, mostly highlighting the frequently bonkers covers but also featuring some interiors, presented in all their slightly yellowing, black and white glory. Along with Spidey, Marvel is represented by a trio of seminal Jack Kirby *Black Panther* issues, as well as a contrasting mix of original and *Uncanny X-Men*.

Intriguingly, the only original superhero art – from last year's *Nubia: Real One* – was initially created digitally by artist Robyn Smith, and there's some interesting background detail about how DC's first female black superhero went from obscurity as a *Wonder Woman* supporting character in the '70s to headlining her own book.

With the trope arguably not so prevalent in UK comics, it's a shame that the only vintage British offering is a one-pager from '60s girls' weekly *Princess*, but some eye-catching new work from contemporary artists like Woodrow Phoenix more than makes up for that. Fun for all the family. **Stephen Jewell**





LUSUS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

Approx 30 minutes per episode |

Podcast

► Broadcaster Radio 4/BBC Sounds

AUDIO DRAMA What's the thing

that really keeps you up at night? This latest entry in Radio 4 and BBC Sounds' Limelight strand is betting that it's not something supernatural. Instead, creators Rachel C Zisser and Samantha Newton use mundane, everyday fears to create modern horror stories guaranteed to give listeners the creeps.

Each of the eight instalments introduces a new character with his or her own worries: a mother terrified of accidentally harming her child; a man convinced he's dying of cancer; a surgeon obsessed with a set of OCD rituals that avert disaster; and so on. And in each episode, their worst fears come nightmarishly true, thanks to something that lurks behind the door of an old dentist's office.

Each half-hour story stands alone, but there are also references to other episodes tucked into each one, as well as hints at a bigger, overarching horror. It's cleverly written, with strong performances from a well-qualified cast (including *Saint Maud's* Morfydd Clark, *The Terror's* Alistair Petrie, and *Black Narcissus's* Patsy Ferran) and some properly skin-crawling foley.

Which episode you find scariest probably depends on which set of anxieties most closely aligns with your own. But given the wide-ranging horrors, everyone but the most staunchly self-assured should find something here to shiver about. **Sarah Dobbs**



BATMAN: EVERYBODY LIES

Tellin' Stories

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 19 MAY**

Number of players: 2-4

► Publisher Portal Games

BOARDGAME Batman is sometimes

called "the world's greatest detective", so an investigative game that puts you in the Batsuit makes sense, right? This isn't that.

Open the box and you're presented with four sealed manila envelopes each representing a mystery to solve (when you've played through these the set is done, but given that each case should last a few hours it's not bad value). Players then take on the part of Catwoman, Harvey Bullock, Warren Spacey or Vicki Vale. You work together to read out the Lead cards, take notes and look for clues. You'll also be

“A pleasant enough way to spend an afternoon”

prompted to go to the companion website where you can browse additional files and, at the end of the investigation, answer a series of multiple choice questions to determine the truth.

The story feels appropriate to the Gotham setting and the mysteries are pretty engaging. You can't play as the Dark Knight himself but he does stick his cowl in from time to time, and it's fun to adopt the voice of your character.

It's more reading than playing, though, with most cards cramming in hundreds of words in tiny (sometimes poorly formatted) text. The various tokens add little to the mechanics, and while the Scene Deck (decorated with comic panels) is a nice touch, it's mostly there to add atmosphere. *Everybody Lies* is a pleasant enough way to spend an afternoon with friends, but it's more a collaborative storytelling exercise than a game. **Will Salmon**

i *Everybody Lies* uses the same Detective Investigation System as Portal's *Dune*-themed *House Secrets* title of last year.



DOCTOR WHO: BACK TO EARTH

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

167 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO DRAMA Christopher

Eccleston's second series for Big Finish begins with a trio of tales set on the Doctor's favourite planet. Small-scale and melancholy, these are stories which foreground characterisation and human drama.

"Station To Station" sees the TARDIS land in a desolate railway station ruled by the Grimminy-Grue (Ian Bartholomew) – a monster who speaks only in rhyme. An atmospheric adventure in the mould of "The Empty Child", it builds to a satisfying battle of wits between the Time Lord and his fairytale foe.

"The False Dimitry" takes us to 1605 and an obscure nook of history: the first time an imposter claiming to be the son of Ivan the Terrible took control of Russia. Don't worry if you've never heard about this – neither has the Doctor, who gets up to speed via a boatload of exposition. It's an intriguing pseudo-historical, though Katy Brittain rather overdoes the wailing as nursemaid Oksana.

Finally, "Auld Lang Syne" is an ingeniously structured story that follows a family over several New Year's Eves in the same – possibly haunted – house. Leah Broherhead is excellent as Mandy, who grows strongly attached to the house's caretaker and his strange blue box. She'd make a great ongoing companion. Alas, this Doctor is committed to travelling solo – for now. **Will Salmon**



JOHN WYNDHAM

As *The Midwich Cuckoos* comes to the small screen, we pose some, ahem, Random Questions about the renowned British sci-fi author

Quizmaster Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor

QUESTION 1

Which famous comedian starred in the BBC's 2009 TV series of *The Day Of The Triffids*?

QUESTION 2

What relation was John Wyndham to John Beynon and Lucas Parkes?

QUESTION 3

The 1984 television show of *Chocky* had two follow-up series. Name either of them.

QUESTION 4 Picture Question

Name this film based on a John Wyndham story.

QUESTION 5

In which Wyndham novel does the British government have to relocate to Harrogate?

QUESTION 6

Which comedy show featured a sketch in which Triffids attend a middle-class drinks party?

QUESTION 7

In *Trouble With Lichen*, what remarkable property does the drug Antigerone have?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question

Supply the missing title.

QUESTION 9

What was noteworthy about the publication of the Wyndham novels *Web* and *Plan For Chaos*?

QUESTION 10

The rock band Jefferson Airplane wrote a song ("Crown Of Creation") inspired by which Wyndham novel?

QUESTION 11

Which British sci-fi author coined the term "cosy catastrophes" to describe Wyndham's work?



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 12



QUESTION 16

QUESTION 12 Picture Question

Who directed this movie?

QUESTION 13

Which British horror author wrote the 2001 sequel novel *The Night Of The Triffids*?

QUESTION 14

Which anthology series featured a two-in-one adaptation of the Wyndham short stories "Time to Rest" and "No Place Like Earth"?

QUESTION 15

And which anthology series featured an adaptation of Wyndham's "Consider Her Ways"?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question

Name this John Wyndham character.

QUESTION 17

Complete the title of this short story collection by the author: *The Seeds Of* ____.

QUESTION 18

In 2016, which politician made a cameo appearance (playing themselves) in an adaptation of *The Kraken Wakes*, broadcast on Radio Four?

QUESTION 19

What's uncharacteristic about John Wyndham's 1935 novel *Foul Play Suspected*?

QUESTION 20

In the 1962 film of *The Day Of The Triffids*, what substance is fortuitously discovered to be deadly to the killer plants?

Answers
1 Eddie Izzard 2 They were his pseudonyms! 3 Chocky's Children or Chocky's Challenge 4 Quest For Love 5 The Kraken Wakes 6 Alexei Sayle's Stuff 7 It slows the ageing process 8 Children Of The Damned 9 They were published posthumously 10 The Chrysalids 11 Brian Aldiss 12 John Carpenter 13 Simon Clark 14 Out Of The Unknown 15 The Alfred Hitchcock Hour (Alfred Hitchcock Presents is okay) 16 Bill Masen 17 Time 18 Nicola Sturgeon 19 It's a crime novel 20 Sea water

How did you do?

What Wyndham work are you?

0-5

Trouble With Thinkin'

6-10

"Dumb Martian"

11-15

Mid(wich)-range

16-19

"It's A Wise Child"

20

Triffic!

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

SFX 354
ON SALE
15 JUNE

THOR:
LOVE AND
THUNDER
YE GODS!

PRIDE
DC AND MARVEL TALK
A DEEPER LOVE

RESIDENT
EVIL
IT'S JUST A LITTLE SEEPAGE

GAMES
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THE
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ALL CONTENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE, ESPECIALLY IF SOMEONE TURNS THE LECCY OFF

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy



Funny Man

Ed Ricketts, Production Editor



The year 1994 was one of the best of my life. I was 23 and somehow getting paid pretty well for writing about PCs and gaming – my two biggest passions. Smoking, boozing and other things were a way of life; Supergrass’ “Alright” genuinely could have been our theme tune.

So when I first saw *Funny Man*, it was tailor-made for me. Here was a very British comedy horror film, made – by a bunch of mates of roughly my age – for a laugh: designed to shock à la *Viz*, but undoubtedly a passion project with some impressively imaginative visuals.

The plot is simple. In a game of poker, cokehead music producer Max wins an old stately house from a mysterious stranger

(Christopher Lee, in it for all of five minutes). When he attempts to install his family there, he inadvertently invokes the Funny Man, an ancient trickster spirit who proceeds to merrily murder anyone he comes across, including another bunch of misfits who rock up for plot purposes. The killings start with a simple bludgeoning but turn into increasingly elaborate and surreal set-pieces, including a memorable “psychedelic wig evening”.

Understandably, Lee’s face was plastered all over the publicity, but *Funny Man* would be nothing without an extraordinary turn by Tim James as the lead character. The self-confessed performer – as opposed to actor – gurns, prances and smirks his way through the increasingly daft carnage, often while mugging to the camera and making self-

referential remarks – in an accent that veers from his native Welsh to generic northern English, depending on what’s funnier. It sounds wearisome, but the sheer exuberance and comic chops that James brings to the role is mesmerising. He’s a horrible character, but you’d still love to go to the pub with him.

Despite its sniggering schoolboy naughtiness, *Funny Man* feels like a heartfelt piece of work: absolutely born of its time, and far removed from the cynical faux-cultiness of something like *The Greasy Strangler*. As a person, *Funny Man* would give you a fag and a can of lager, punch you in the face, and then bugger off. ●

Ed is still annoyed that someone nicked his Funny Man T-shirt before he’d even worn it.

Fact Attack!

→ *Funny Man* Tim James is now a volunteer RNLI lifeboatman at Teddington, and once helped to save a 12-year-old girl.

→ Director Simon Sprackling decided to make *Funny Man* more of a character after seeing James in his Punch-like garb chatting up girls.

→ Filming took place in a huge mental hospital that had closed only the year before. Cast and crew lived on site in order to reduce costs.

→ Essex-born Pauline Black of ska band The Selecter had to learn a Jamaican accent for her role as the “Psychic Commando”.

→ The 2019 Blu-ray release lacks several excellent interviews from the 2006 DVD version, including one with Tim James.

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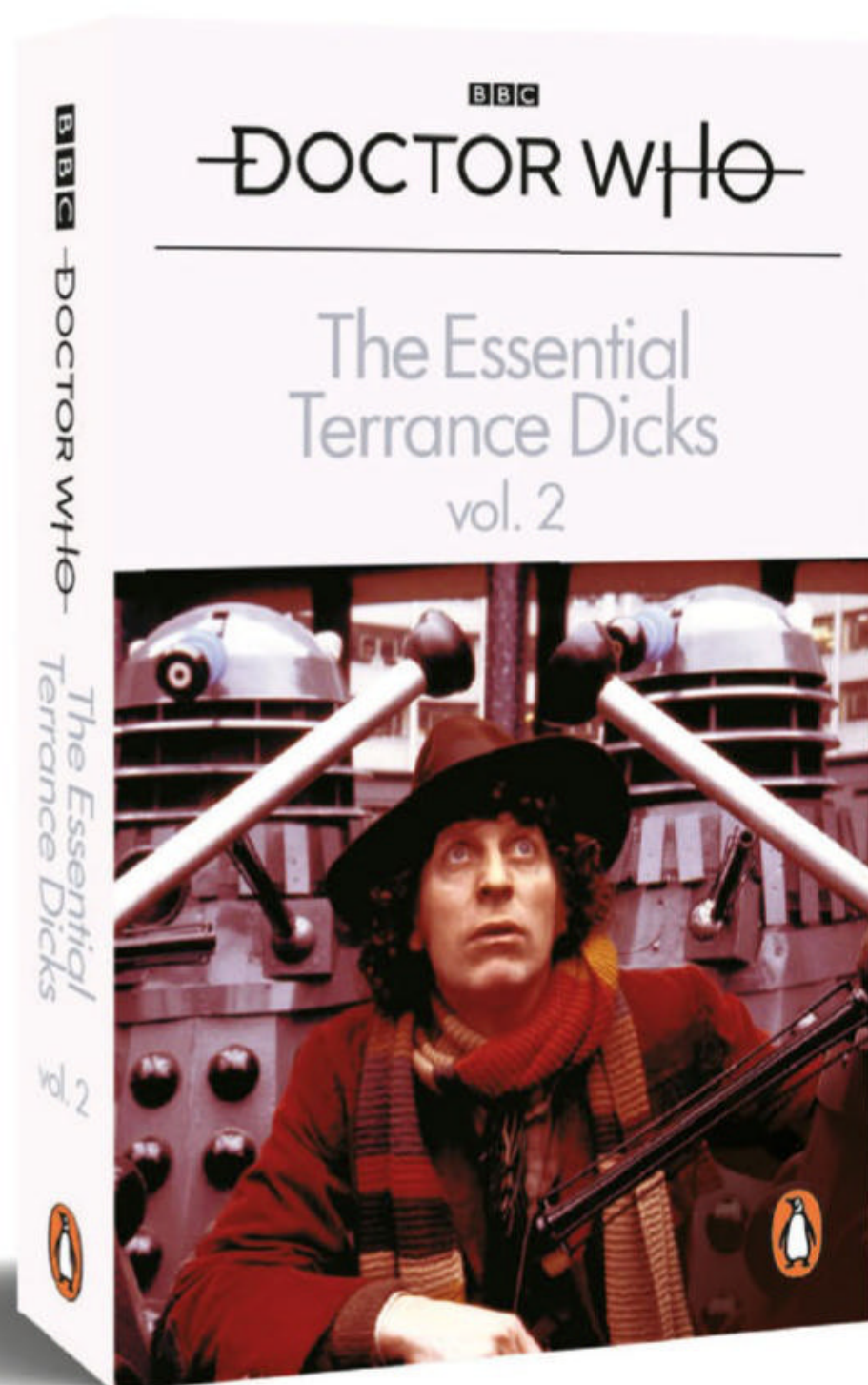
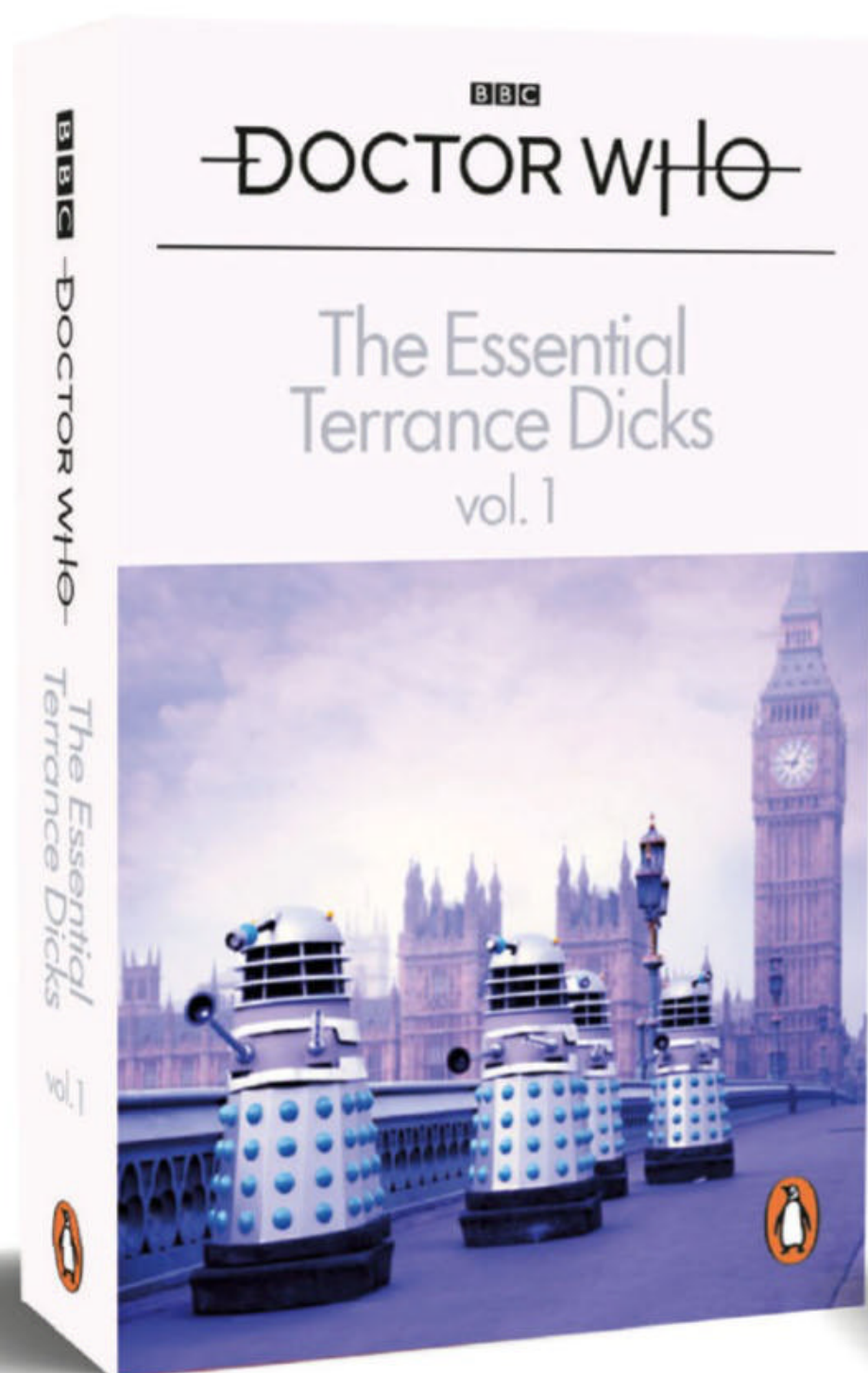
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DOCTOR WHO



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